consumer electronics

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Tips For Traveling With Your Digicam

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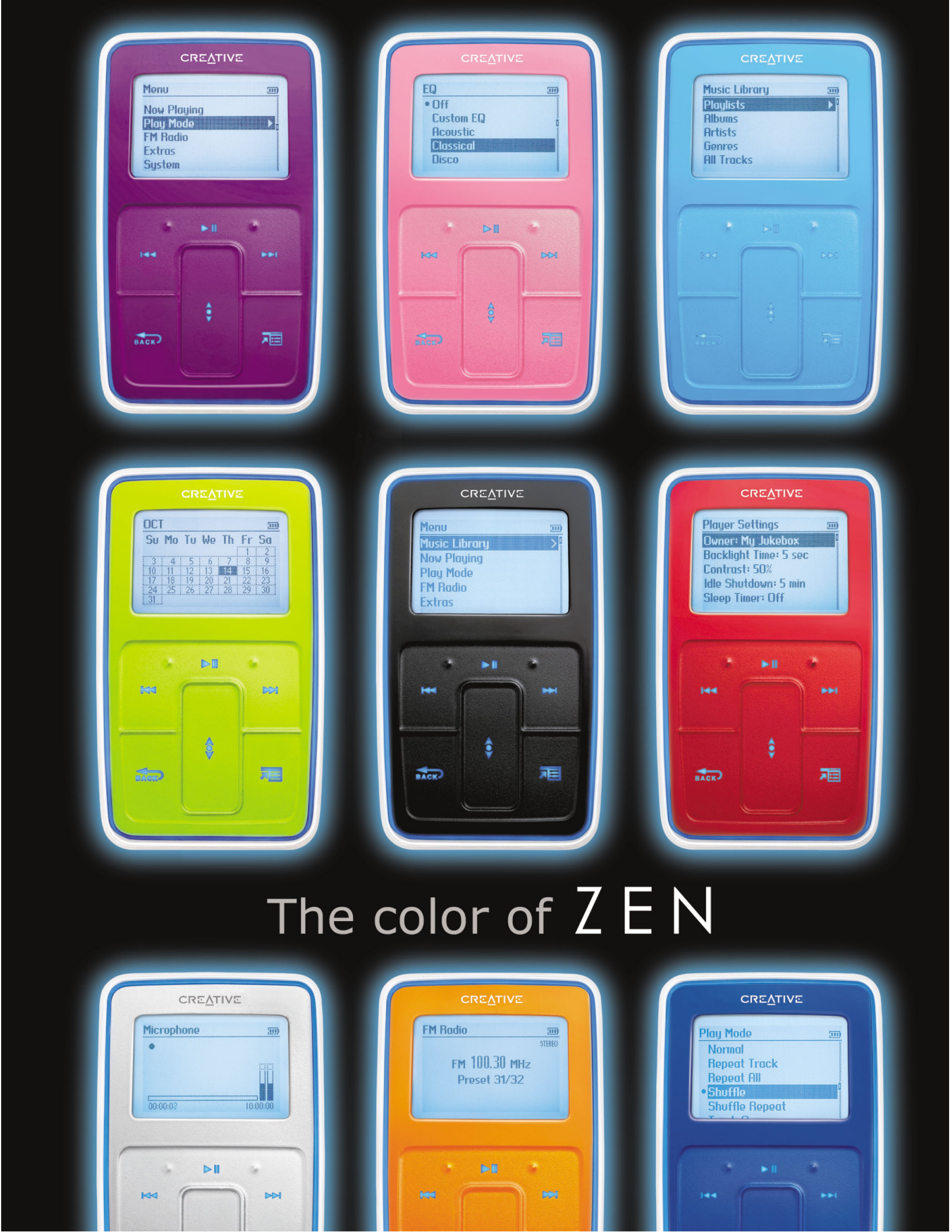
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lifestyle close-up

DVRs (Digital Video Recorders)

Most of our schedules are so hectic that we can't consistently watch our favorite TV programs, and even when we can, who likes sitting though the commercials? DVRs let you watch your shows when and how you want to, freeing up your schedule and maximizing your well-earned downtime. With DVRs, you don't have to be tied to one evening—or even to your couch.

34 **Digital Video Recorders**
Make TV Work For You

38 **Room To Grow**
DVRs With Space To Spare

42 **TV On Your PC**
Record Television Shows To Your Computer

46 **Record & Burn**
With DVR/DVD Recorders, You Can Watch Your Shows & Keep Them Too

49 **Editor's Top 10**
Reasons I Love These Devices

50 **Tips**
Manage Your DVR's Quality Settings

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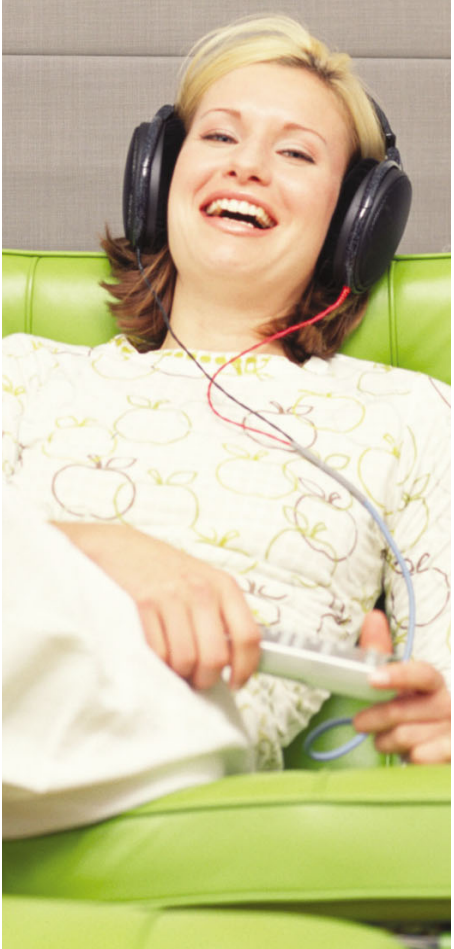
Table Of Contents
Volume 2 Issue 7



Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *CE Lifestyles*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

8 **CE News**

14 **ShelfWatch**
A Look At The Latest Consumer Electronics

16 **Outfit Your Life**
Accessories With Style

18 **Shopping Site Of The Month**
Yahoo! Shopping (www.shopping.yahoo.com)

A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

20 **Affordable Audio To Go**
The Best Portable Digital Audio Players For Less Than $200

24 **Kids & Camcorders**
Shoot Better Videos Of Your Children

28 **The Latest DVD Players**
Lower Prices, More Features & Greater Capacities

30 **TV Types**
Choose A TV That's Right For You

32 **Tips**
Speed Camcorder Response Times

Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

52 **Roam For The Holidays**
Take Your Digital Camera Overseas

58 **Know How**
One Problem, Three Solutions

62 **Best Digital Cameras For Women**
We Want Form & Function

65 **Tips**
Edit Your Vacation Videos

CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

66 **All-In-One Smartphones**
Multimedia Goes Mobile

72 **Back-To-School Notebooks**
A Laptop Is A Girl's Best Friend

74 **Satellite TV vs. Digital Cable**
The Rivalry Continues To Grow

79 **Tips**
Cell Phone Repair

CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. And so as not to forget our roots, "Retroscope" traces how a favorite CE device has changed over the years.

106 **Music & Movies**

108 **Games & Gifts**

110 **Retroscope**

112 **Exit**

Editor's Note

When I was younger, I loved August, because my birthday is in August. Alright, who am I kidding? I still love August because of my birthday. This month, I'll share with you the top 10 CE devices and equipment that are on my birthday list.

10. Sony DAV-FR9 Home Theater System. What better way to welcome "Revenge Of The Sith" home than with surround sound? (Plus it looks *so* good.)

9. Tulip E-Go. This laptop is so sexy that I can't keep it off my birthday list.

8. Motorola Razr. This is truly frivolous, since I've already got a Treo 650, but they're just so good-looking….

7. Audiovox Under-Cabinet LCD TV & Radio. It would be wonderful to have this TV so I could keep up with "Oz" reruns when I cook dinner. Well, maybe not.

6. Wireless AQUOS LCD TV. Old-school with a twist. (Perfect for our bedroom wall.)

5. Sonos Digital Music System. This would make my birthday party the event of the year.

4. Bose 151 SE Environmental Speakers. This summer we've been doing some great things with our backyard, and these would be excellent for get-togethers on our deck.

3. Sony Kitchen Clock Radio & CD Player. For those times when manicotti and Mercadante could be perfectly paired.

2. Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W5. It's sleek and has a huge LCD and 5.2MP. Perfect for our October Paris trip.

1. iPod mini. (Miah, take note.) An iPod mini (silver, 6GB) is the quintessential CE device to use at home, at work, and during my commute. I have to have it.

If I get even one of these things, I'll be a happy birthday girl.

Me on my fifth birthday, loving August.

Live well, friends.

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ce news

Compiled by Rachel Derowitsch

Home Office Households Quicker To Adapt New Technologies

A new study from International Data Corp. should put a smile on the face of those who work from home. IDC finds that there are more than 33 million home office households in the United States, and that number is expected to reach 37.7 million by 2009. Merle Sandler, a senior research analyst with IDC, says that "while the gap between consumer households and home office households continues to narrow when it comes to the acquisition of technology, there are still strong growth areas in the U.S. home office market."

Thus, those who work from home can expect manufacturers to have them in mind for certain product categories, such as multifunction printers and portable PCs, which IDC predicts will outnumber desktop PCs by the end of 2009.

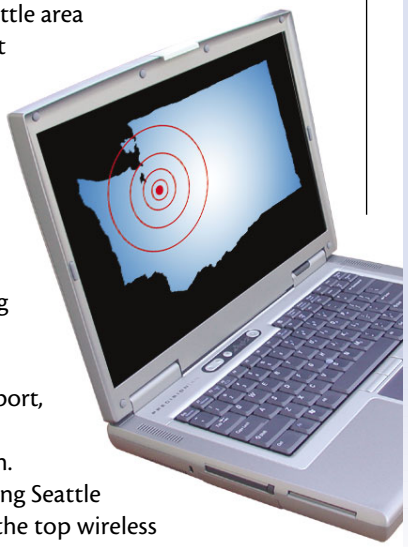
Sharp Introduces First Standalone Microwave Drawer

Is your microwave taking up too much room on the countertop? The Insight Pro Microwave Drawer from Sharp ($849.99; www.sharpusa.com) is now a standalone unit that you can build into your kitchen in a variety of places.

The 30-inch wide KB-6015K model has a large viewing window and easy-touch controls that are angled upward, ideal for placement below the countertop. The drawer is available in stainless steel, black, and white.

Want To Go Wireless? Go To Seattle

Intel's third-annual Most Unwired Cities survey finds that residents and visitors in the greater Seattle area enjoy the greatest number of public wireless accessibility spots, whether sipping a nonfat latte in the original Starbucks, waiting for a flight at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, or in many other points in between.



Closely following Seattle is San Francisco, the top wireless metro area in the 2004 survey. And the biggest improvement was found in Baton Rouge, La., which moved up 67 spots to rank 19th. The 2005 survey of the 100 most populated U.S. metro areas, conducted online for Intel by Harris Interactive, finds that cities all across America are offering wireless connectivity in increasingly diverse locations.

The top 20 wireless metro areas are:

1. Seattle–Bellevue–Everett–Tacoma, Wash.
2. San Francisco–San Jose–Oakland, Calif.
3. Austin–San Marcos, Texas
4. Portland, Ore.–Vancouver, Wash.
5. Toledo, Ohio
6. Atlanta, Ga.
7. Denver, Colo.
8. Raleigh–Durham–Chapel Hill, N.C.
9. Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minn.
10. Orange County, Calif.
11. San Diego, Calif.
12. Chicago, Ill.
13. Boston, Mass.
14. Washington, D.C.
15. Colorado Springs. Colo.
16. Columbus, Ohio
17. Charlotte–Gastonia, N.C.–Rock Hill, S.C.
18. Sacramento, Calif.
19. Baton Rouge, La.
20. New York–Nassau–Suffolk, N.Y.–Newark, N.J.

Talk Comes Cheap With Logitech's QuickCam Chat

With the new QuickCam Chat from Logitech, face-to-face communication via the Internet is very affordable. This starter kit from Logitech ($29.95; www.logitech.com) contains a camera and headset. You can easily mount the camera on top of a monitor or attach it to the side of a flat-panel screen. It produces video images at a rate of up to 30fps (frames per second), depending on the speed of your Web connection and PC.

The eyeball-shaped QuickCam Chat is compatible with both USB 1.1 and 2.0. To use the camera and headset, you'll need to install a program such as MSN Video Conversation, which is part of MSN Messenger 7.0.

Out With The Old iPod, In With The New

Now iPod users can do something friendly for the environment and beneficial for themselves. Apple, the maker of the wildly popular digital music player, has launched a recycling program for old iPods, including the full-sized and mini iPods, and the iPod photo. Just bring in your unwanted iPod to one of Apple's 100 U.S. retail stores, and receive a 10% discount on the purchase of a new iPod that same day.

For store locations, go to www.apple.com/retail.

m a r k e t p l a c e

Top 15 Online Retail Sales Categories

A comprehensive survey of online retailers conducted earlier this year by Nielsen/NetRatings' MegaView Online Retail service found that consumer electronics ranks fifth among categories of products purchased online, based on the average dollar value of each purchase. At nearly $585 per average order, computer hardware purchases easily topped the list, while software finished 11th with $46.76 in average orders.

Product Category	Average Order Size (in U.S. dollars)
1. Computer hardware	$584.47
2. Event & movie tickets	121.60
3. Automotive	119.23
4. Office supplies	102.47
5. Consumer electronics	99.12
6. Child/baby care	86.13
7. Sporting goods & outdoor activities	74.15
8. Home & garden	69.99
9. Shoes & athletic footwear	53.14
10. Flowers, greetings & specialty gifts	51.61
11. Computer software	46.76
12. Jewelry & watches	46.62
13. Health, wellness & beauty	45.94
14. Apparel & accessories	44.68
15. Toys, games & hobbies	40.41

Source: Nielsen/NetRatings

Top-Selling PDA Manufacturers

A survey of PDA sales in March shows that palmOne dominates the market of handheld devices.

Manufacturer	Market Share
palmOne	65.7
Hewlett-Packard	26
Sony	4.2
Toshiba	1.9
Symbol Tech	0.6

Source: NPD Group, NPD Techworld

tidbits

Households in America own an average of 25 consumer electronics products. In addition, each household on average spends more than $1,250 each year on CE products.

Source: Consumer Electronics Association's "CE Ownership and Market Potential" study

Women aged 30 to 64 are the biggest segment of Web users who use the Internet to conduct health research. Nearly 80% of Internet users, or 95 million American adults, use the Web to look up medical-related information.

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project

XM Satellite radio announced in May that it has surpassed 4 million subscribers. The company gained 1 million new customers in less than five months.

More than one-third of the software installed on PCs worldwide in 2004 was pirated. The United States has the lowest piracy rate (21%), while Vietnam has the highest (92%).

Source: Business Software Alliance/IDC

54% of adults who use the Internet go online via a broadband connection.

Source: The Harris Poll

Denon's philosophy is simple.

Either
you're
innovating
or
you're
imitating.

Introducing Denon's New AVR-5805

The World's First 10-channel A/V Receiver With Fully Configurable 4-zone Capabilities

A Breakthrough In Multi-source, Multi-zone Flexibility

For the home entertainment enthusiast and custom installer alike, Denon's new AVR-5805 delivers unprecedented four-zone home entertainment integration and control — all from a single component. With 10 configurable and discrete amplifiers, 16-channels of audio output, and the world's first-ever ability to drive two fully independent 5.1 systems, the AVR-5805 will also route audio and video signals from up to four independent sources and distribute them to up to four separate zones throughout the home. Its advanced capabilities even allow discrete power, source selection and volume control of each zone. And flexibility is just the beginning. Read on.

Masterful Technologies And A "Sweet Spot" For Every Listener

Behind the AVR-5805's newly designed, easy-to-read front panel display is a profusion of powerful technologies. An Equal Power amplifier section delivers a massive 170 watts of high-current power into each of its ten channels, processing for every popular 7.1-, 6.1- and 5.1-channel surround sound format — from Dolby (including Pro Logic IIx) and dts, to THX Ultra2 and THX Surround EX. The AVR-5805 also introduces the latest in Auto Setup Calibration and Equalization with the Audyssey MultEQ$_{XT}$ system, tailoring sound not only to the listening environment but also to the audience. This advanced technology analyzes and calibrates six critical settings including variable crossover point detection. It also determines the correct frequency response for up to six separate listener positions and then averages all six. The result? Literally a "sweet spot" for every listener in the room.

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The AVR-5805 offers a full complement of advanced processing capabilities like HDMI/DVI digital video selection, video up-scaling (including Faroudja DCDi technology for analog sources) and the world's first dual, independent video conversion for unmatched simplicity and the highest picture quality from all your video gear. For even greater A/V performance, it employs the most advanced Texas Instruments' and Analog Devices' 32-bit DSP processors, Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs, as well as Denon's newly improved DDSC-D (Dynamic Discrete Surround Decoder-Digital). And to top it off, exclusive Advanced AL24 Processing Plus circuitry maximizes all source signals so that the high-resolution DA converters work at peak capacity.

More Connection Options Than Any Receiver In The Industry

In addition to an extensive complement of digital and analog A/V connections, the AVR-5805 includes a full array of "custom installation" features: assignable high amperage DC trigger outputs, dual RS-232C ports to facilitate integrated system and PC connectivity, and a built-in Ethernet port that adds more system control as well as future updates and upgrades. In-demand connection options include 6 high-bandwidth (100 MHz,) HDTV-compatible component video inputs, HD switching for 2 zones and much more. Finally, the latest version of Denon Link 3 and dual IEEE-1394 inputs allow for reception of high-resolution, multi-channel digital audio data directly from compatibly equipped DVD players. It all adds up to total flexibility and the ultimate level of sonic performance. Denon does it again.

DENON

The First Name in Digital Audio

shelfwatch

Compiled by Greg Anderson

Sharing is important, both in grade school and in the grown-up world. This month we highlight tools that can help us share our information, experiences, and lives. And that's the whole point.

Firefly Mobile Firefly

$99.95 and up

www.fireflymobile.com

If you're looking for a way to give kids a limited and controlled way to call home and other key numbers, without all the responsibility and cost of a full-featured mobile phone, take a look at Firefly Mobile. The Firefly phone is specially sized for kids, is limited to calling a parent-programmed list of 22 numbers, and can be set to only accept calls from an approved caller list. The $99.95 price includes 30 minutes of prepaid talk time. Pay-as-you-go and other prepaid plans are available from Firefly's Web site and Target stores.

Belkin TuneStage for iPod

$179.99

www.belkin.com

Pop your iPod or iPod mini into the TuneStage and play music on almost any stereo or shelf system. Just plug the Bluetooth transmitter into your iPod and connect the receiver to any RCA or line-in audio jack. Then use your iPod to select and change songs or playlists from up to 33 feet away.

palmOne Tungsten E2

$249

www.palmone.com

When you just want to store your calendar and contacts in a small, stylish, and simple package, check out palmOne's latest Tungsten model. The E2 does everything a normal PDA will do and adds Documents To Go software (for working in Word, Excel, and PowerPoint on the go) and MP3 playback. Bluetooth connectivity lets you sync and share with other devices within about 30 feet.

Sanyo NV-E7500

$1,499

www.sanyo.com

Give your navigator something to do when she isn't helping with directions. Sanyo's portable navigation system combines GPS (global positioning system) navigation (useful in and out of the car) with a portable DVD/CD player, so your little one can watch Dora while you're trying to find the dance recital.

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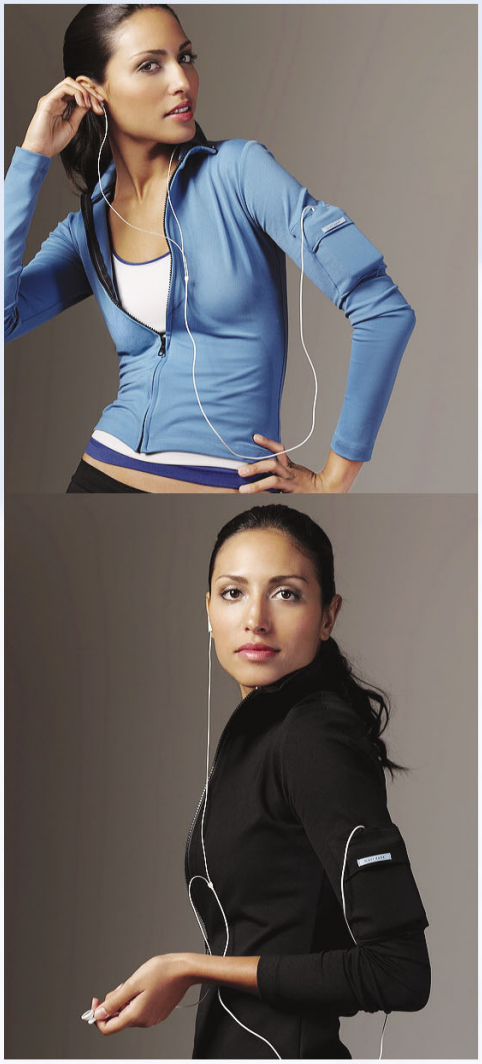
Summer is hot.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



mari dade iPod zip jacket
$98 • www.maridade.com

After nearly a decade in the fashion industry, Maria Rosenthal decided to create her own line of sophisticated, comfortable sportswear incorporating the designer's "Brasilian casual" style. According to Maria, "The collection is based on the idea that women should look and feel beautiful when exercising, lounging, or just hanging out." Hence the mari dade iPod zip jacket. Made of breathable Supplex performance material that's available in a variety of energizing colors, the design features a sleeve pocket for your iPod. It's also available in a pullover shirt.

Lala Signature Paris Bag
$435 • www.lalalaptop.com

According to the designer, this signature tote in the Lala line of laptop bags, the Paris, "is named for the place where Lala's husband proposed to her a few years ago in a quaint little restaurant." The bag features a padded interior space for your laptop, lots of pockets, silver hardware, and a detachable exterior bag that converts to a smaller purse. Choose your favorite from 14 style and color options.

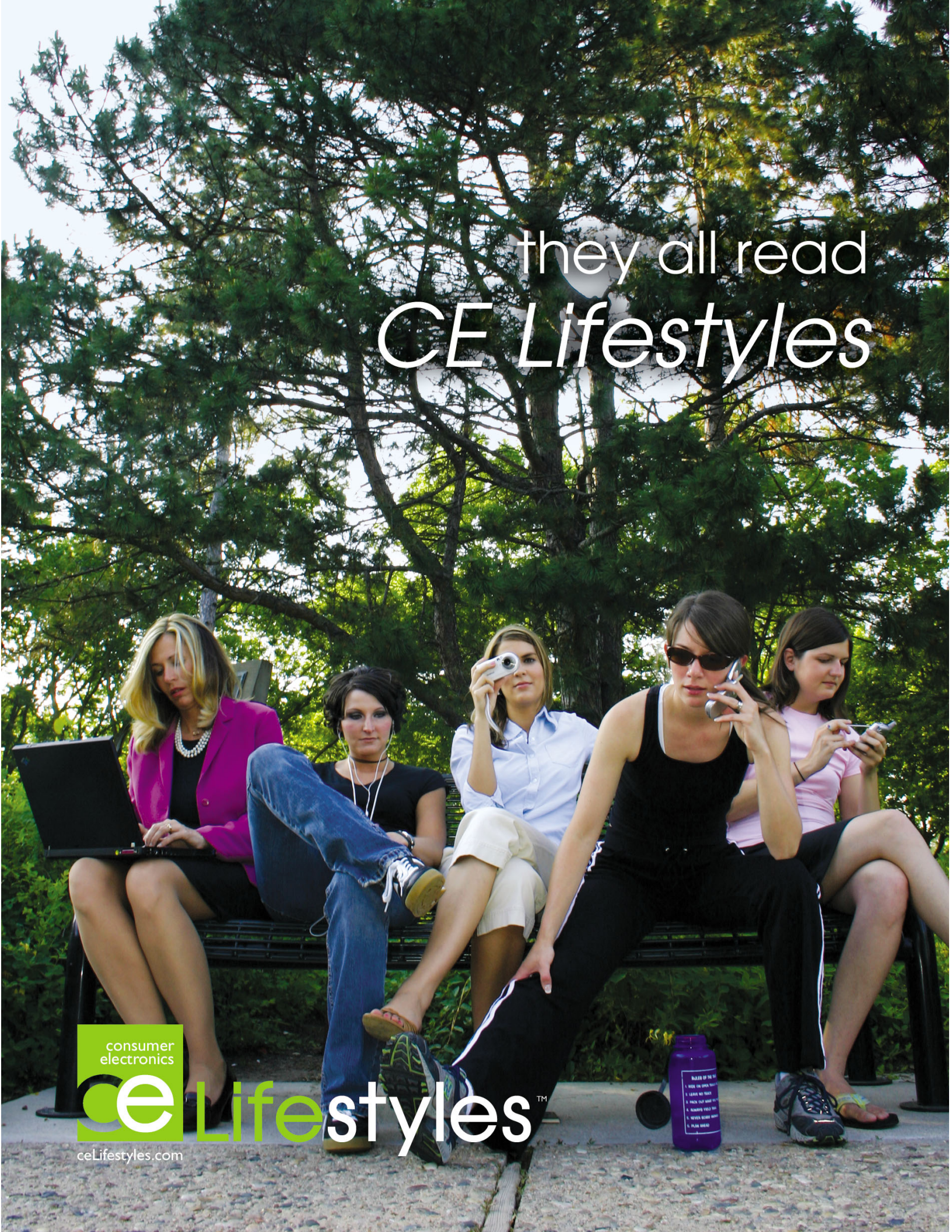
HP Photosmart R607 Harajuku Lovers Digital Camera by Gwen Stefani
$249 • www.hp.com/united-states/camera/gwen

HP and pop star Gwen Stefani have teamed up to produce this limited-edition digital camera named for the fashion-trendy Harajuku area of Tokyo. "A camera is clearly a modern-day accessory, so I thought, 'Why not design a unique, stylish version of it?'," Stefani said in a press release. "So we added it to the line, and it's super-kawaii ['super-cute' in Japanese]."

Get 'em while they're kawaii: HP only produced 3,000 of these cameras, and purchases are limited to one per customer.

Genevieve Gauckler Mobile Wallpaper
$9 (price at press time) • www.g2works.com/bio.html; www.yakuta.com (download)

As long as you're carrying the Lala Paris bag, give your Nokia or Ericsson mobile phone a continental flair with a piece of screen art by internationally known graphic designer Genevieve Gauckler. These 10 quirky wallpaper designs were created originally for Yakuta Mobile Visuals of Finland and are available via download from the company's Web site.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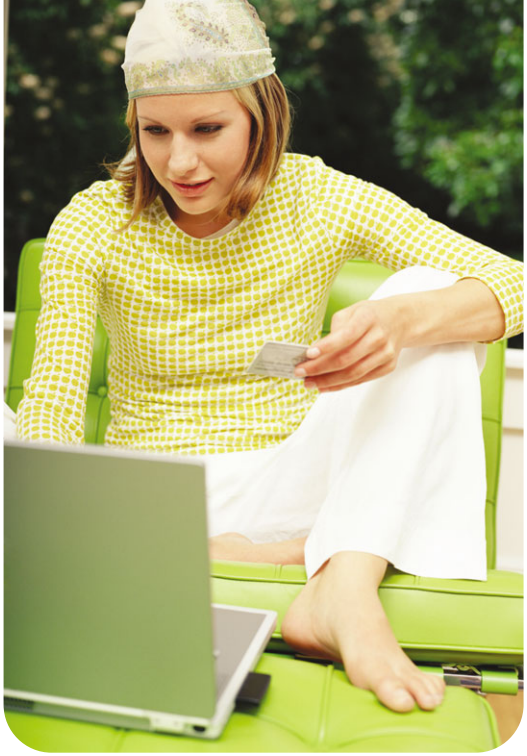

Shopping Site Of The Month

Yahoo! Shopping

www.shopping.yahoo.com

Yahoo! Shopping is an online shopper's dream come true. It's like having a mall hidden in your computer—only at this mall, there is no searching for a parking spot, no battling over the last pair of perfect shoes, and no waiting in line at the register, all in an easy-to-use format. What could be better than that?

Yahoo! Shopping provides several ways to help you enjoy your online shopping experience. The site lists categories on the left side of the home page and store logos on the right. While the categories help guide you through Yahoo!'s site, the logos are paid advertisements that take you directly to that merchant's Web site.

Shopping Made Easy

Yahoo! Shopping helps you shop for gifts online through the Find The Perfect Gift feature. Choose the appropriate occasion (Birthday, New Baby, or Just Because, to name a few) on the home page. Through a series of choices, including age, relationship, and personality, you will be able to hone in on the perfect gift. The resulting list of Recommended Gifts will include several categories with multiple gift ideas based on your selections. Once you select the category you'd like to view, you can sort items by Best Recommendations, Price High – Low, or Price Low – High.

Yahoo! Shopping's home page also has a Top 5 Popular list. The list shows you popular choices for several categories of products at a glance. At press time, you could view five laptop computers, digital cameras, and MP3 players. The Top 5 list includes thumbnails of each item, a user rating, reviews, and a price range. Select an item, and Yahoo! Shopping will show you merchants that sell that product. To figure out your total cost, enter your ZIP code in the Calculate Total Price field to the right of the merchant list. The Buying Info button to the far right will take you to the merchant's Web site so you can make your purchase.

So Much Shopping, So Little Time

With all of the features Yahoo! Shopping has to offer, it's easy to lose yourself in the possibilities. Even if you don't know where to begin browsing, it doesn't take long to find your way. What are you waiting for? Start shopping. ce

BY JOY MARTIN

The Quest For The Perfect Handbag

In the name of research, I decided to give Yahoo! Shopping a try. This was the perfect excuse to treat myself to a new handbag. Under Clothing & Accessories, I selected Handbags and ended up with 17,951 results for women's bags, handbags, and wallets. I then selected Coach under Brand in the Refine Results For section on the left side of the screen. With 169 results, I narrowed my choices further by selecting Hobo Bags and then Leather from the same section and was left with six bags. I finally decided on a green jacquard bag with tan leather trim and appliqué ladybugs. I clicked the link for that bag and was taken to Coach's Web site (www.coach.com), where I could buy the bag online.

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Affordable Audio To Go

The Best Portable Digital Audio Players For Less Than $200

In 1979 Sony's Walkman portable cassette player made music mobile, and we've walked to our own groove ever since. The birth of MP3 and other types of audio files let us put our tunes in ever-smaller devices while at the same time increasing the number of songs we could carry. Portable digital audio players have changed the way we move to our music. Most electronics stores carry dozens of portable audio players in a variety of sizes and prices. We rounded up four of our favorite players priced for less than $200. That's enough for you to buy a good-quality player with plenty of storage, and you'll still have enough left over to buy a better set of earbuds or a few new CDs.

Apple iPod shuffle

Apple's iPods are not just portable audio players; they've become cultural icons. You can store your entire music library en masse on a typical iPod, but the shuffle is designed to store a handful of your favorite songs in a very small package. The shuffle's minimalist design and ice-white coat make the device look almost like nothing at all—a white monolith in miniature. It has no screen, and only the small ring of buttons on its front and the sliding switch on its back suggest (barely) that it's an electronic device at all.

The shuffle we reviewed had 1GB of memory, enough room to store about 240 songs in the AAC (Advanced Audio Coding) format at

128Kbps (kilobits per second). A 512MB version is available for $99. Alas, the shuffle does not support Microsoft's popular WMA (Windows Media Audio) format, but the shuffle's iTunes software can make AAC copies of your unprotected WMA files. The shuffle also plays MP3, WAV (Wave), and Audible files.

The soul of the shuffle is, as the name implies, its shuffle option. Once you store your tunes, you can play them sequentially or shuffle them randomly. Many iPod users love the shuffle feature on original iPods, so Apple essentially designed this player around that very idea. Thus the reason why the shuffle has no screen with which to navigate through song lists. If you're leaving your music selection to chance, why bother?

The shuffle is the player to get if you're the sporty type. It won't weigh you down, yet it stores enough tunes to get you through a 10K and back again. Then again, we're just as happy to use it while relaxing in a beach chair drinking sangria.

Apple iPod shuffle

$149

www.apple.com/ipodshuffle

Storage capacity: 1GB

Size: 3.3 x 0.98 x 0.33 inches*

Battery life: 12 hours

Audio File support: MP3/MP3Vbr/AAC(M4A,M4b,M4p)/Audible2,3,4/WAV

Cool features: Excellent design, easy controls

Summary: Sleek and chic

**HxWxD*

Creative Zen Micro

The Creative Zen Micro's big and relatively heavy body dwarfs that of the shuffle. The Zen Micro is not the player to take with you on long hikes. On the other hand, its 5GB of storage (about 83 hours of music recorded at 128Kbps) is by far the largest among the players in this group, so it would be good for road trips. And the Zen Micro is not without a sense of style. It's available in several bright colors that appear to come straight from a box of Dots.

The Zen Micro has a touch-sensitive slider and buttons you use to scroll through songs and settings. It'll probably take a little time to get used to the touch controls' sensitivity (which is adjustable), but once you do, the Zen Micro is pretty easy to manage.

One of our favorite Zen Micro features is its removable rechargeable Lithium-Ion battery. Most large portable audio players use such a battery, which eventually wears out, but the batteries are typically buried in the players and are nearly impossible to change. Not so with the Zen Micro: Just slide the back off the player and pop in a new battery. It couldn't be easier.

The Zen Micro supports the basic cadre of audio file formats (MP3, WMA, and WAV) and also has a built-in FM radio receiver. Unless you're a converted iPod user, you should be able to port your music library into the player without a lot of hassle.

Creative Zen Micro

$199.99

www.creative.com

Storage capacity: 5GB

Size: 3.3 x 2 x 0.7 inches*

Battery life: 12 hours

Audio File support: MP3/WMA/WAV

Cool features: Touch-sensitive controls, juicy colors

Summary: A fat and sassy audio player

*HxWxD

iRiver iFP 899

iRiver knows how to make great audio players, and the iFP 899 is one of iRiver's best. The player's sound quality is top-notch, and it's the most customizable of all the players we discuss here. You can tweak just about anything in the player, from the scroll speed to visualizations to preset EQ settings. You can customize your own EQ settings (with which you can fine-tune the bass, treble, and mid-range audio), and you can even tell the player whether you're using an alkaline or rechargeable battery.

Speaking of which, this player has the longest single-charge battery life among all the players in this group. It can play up to 40 hours of music using a single AA battery that is easier to replace than a roll of toilet paper. (Your husband probably won't bother to replace the battery, either.)

The iFP 899 doesn't skimp on file support. It plays the usual MP3 and WMA files but also supports Microsoft's ASF (Advanced Streaming Format), as well as OGG (Ogg Vorbis) files, a popular alternative audio format among portable audiophiles. None of the other players in this group support Ogg Vorbis, so if you're an OGG fan, this is the player for you. You can also tune in to your favorite local FM station with the iFP 899.

Be sure to keep the manual close by when you first start using the iFP 899. Although its menus and controls are fairly intuitive, there are so many settings and options that it'll take a little time to learn all the ins and outs of the player. The basic controls are easy to master, though.

iRiver iFP 899

$179.99

www.iriveramerica.com

Storage capacity: 1GB

Size: 1.1 x 3.5 x 1.4 inches*

Battery life: 40 hours

Audio File support: MP3/WMA/ASF/OGG

Cool features: Excellent sound, lots of features

Summary: The player for those who like options

*HxWxD

Samsung YP-T7X

The Samsung YP-T7X has little in common with the other players in this group. It doesn't have a catchy name as do the shuffle or Zen Micro, and it has only 512MB of memory rather than 1GB. On the plus side, this is the only player with a color LCD. It also has a cool blue brushed-metal case, and these two design features make the YP-T7X look and feel more expensive than it is.

It also sounds like it should be more expensive. The earbuds included with the YP-T7X are the best of any portable audio player we've ever listened to. The YP-T7X's file support is pretty basic (MP3, WMA, and ASF) but will suffice for most users. As with the iFP 899 and the Zen Micro, you can dial up your favorite radio station on this player.

Like the other non-Apple players we looked at, the YP-T7X has preset EQ settings. But its customizable EQ was the easiest to adjust and, in our opinion, is a feature that we really like. One feature we didn't care for was the player's built-in picture viewer. You can import JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) images and view them on the YP-T7X's color screen. It's a good idea in theory, but the screen is so small that the images don't look very nice. Still, we dig the color LCD, especially at this player's price.

Samsung YP-T7X

$150

www.samsung.com

Storage capacity: 512MB

Size: 2.46 x 1.47 x 0.58 inches*

Battery life: 10 hours

Audio File support: MP3/WMA/ASF

Cool features: Color screen, metal case, JPEG image support

Summary: Small size, but good bling factor

*HxWxD

Let's Dance

The cost of portable audio players has dropped to the point where just about anyone can afford one, but of course you still want to make a good investment. The four we cover here are different enough that you should find one that suits your style, yet each player is excellent in its own right. And for less than $200, it's hard to go wrong.

BY MICHAEL SWEET

Relax

Entertain

Romance

In the Mood?

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Kids & Camcorders

Shoot Better Videos Of Your Children

Many women invest in their first digital camcorder so they can capture their children's early years. One thing many of us learn quickly is that filming kids can be difficult. They are always on the go, and they sometimes feel uneasy or misbehave when the camera's rolling.

Comfortable Camcorder Kids

Some kids need a little bit of help to get comfortable in front of the camera. Many people make the mistake of assuming that the deer-in-headlights phenomenon only happens when a child is shy or scared of the camera. However, this is not always the case.

Sometimes a child may freeze in front of the camcorder because she's used to people taking photos of her with a still camera, so she stands still and smiles when you put the camcorder to your eye. If your child is not familiar with the idea of a camcorder, spend some time showing her how the camcorder works. See the "Tips For Recording Great Videos Of Kids" sidebar for suggestions on how to teach your child what a camcorder is all about.

A child may also find the camcorder less intimidating if you carry it in a case that does not look like a giant bag that contains gadgets she doesn't understand or

GREAT VIDEOS Of Kids

Tips For Recording

It's never too early to plan your winter masterpiece: When you film kids building snowmen, making snow angels, or sledding, it may be difficult to operate your camcorder while wearing gloves. Consider a pair of Photo Gloves ($21.99; www.lowepro.com), which have rubber dots on the palms and fingers to help you securely grip your camcorder and its controls.

One of the most common mistakes people make when capturing video of their children is standing tall while recording their kids, who are much shorter. Don't be afraid to crouch down on the ground to film so that when you show the movie later, viewers will see the world through a child's eyes. Shooting at your child's eye level also lets you get more shots of her expressions rather than the top of her head. If you find it difficult to get low enough to shoot at kids' eye levels, you can twist the camera's LCD to face upward so that you can hold the camera at a lower level and look down at the screen.

Make the most of your camcorder's LCD. If this is the first time your child has seen a camcorder, help him learn how it works before you start recording. Show him how you record a moving object, such as a bird hopping on the lawn, and then use the LCD to play back the movie. This makes the camcorder a little less intimidating, and it can help kids understand that a camcorder records movement. Too often, kids see a camcorder and think they should stand still and smile as if it were a still camera. A quick introduction to the camcorder can alleviate such problems.

isn't allowed to touch. You might consider a case, such as the Anika Candy Stripe Camcorder Bag ($29.99; www.circuitcity.com), which doesn't scream, "I'm carrying a camcorder!" It has the added benefit of being quite fashionable.

Distraction Is Your Friend

Ironically, some of the best ways to help a shy child be comfortable in front of a camcorder can also help tame a kid who behaves rambunctiously when filmed. In both cases, the best thing you can do is to remove the pressure to perform. Create a distraction so that kids have something to think about besides the camcorder.

Play together. You might move the emphasis away from the camcorder by joining your child in the video after setting the camcorder up on a tripod, such as the Manfrotto 3011BN With 3126 Micro Fluid Head ($240; www.bogenimaging.us), which works best with lightweight camcorders. If you aren't standing behind the camera, it is easier for a child to stop thinking about it and behave more like his normal self. Most of us have the idea that we should record our kids but stay out of the video. In fact, though, movies of yourself interacting with your child will be cherished by both of you in later years. To ensure that you can hear yourselves speak, you should use a camcorder, such as the Canon ZR400 ($549; www.canonusa.com), that includes a jack for an external microphone.

Plan something fun. If it is the first time your child has been taped, it is especially important to plan a project or game for your child to do while you record. This lets you simply document the activity, and it doesn't place your child in the spotlight where she feels that you are demanding a performance. You might want to make a craft or set out a bottle of bubbles. The idea is that you make it easy for her to find something to do so she can concentrate on the activity rather than

AGE MATTERS

The best equipment and methods for filming a child depend very much on her age.

Babies

Don't forget to shoot videos of the whole family together. Either set the camcorder on a desktop or use a tripod so you can record the whole family with the baby.

When taking shots of only the baby, don't be afraid to get close so you can capture each detail of her facial expressions and development. Look for a quiet camcorder so you can record clips of the baby sleeping peacefully. Spend some time with the display models in stores to see which have the quietest motors. Your camcorder should also perform well in low-light conditions.

18 months to 5 years

At these ages, children are constantly moving and full of energy. Therefore, it is important that you find a camcorder that starts up quickly. Spend some time in stores checking display models for startup times.

You will also want a camcorder such as Sony's DCR-PC55 MiniDV Handycam ($799.99; www.sonystyle.com) that is easy to carry. You never know when a great video moment might happen, so choose a camcorder that is lightweight.

6 years and up

By the time a kid reaches about 6 years old, you will record more planned events, such as dance recitals, soccer games, and school plays. Size and portability is not as important as it is when filming toddlers, so you can look for a larger, more full-featured camcorder and tripod to capture those moments.

Also consider the distance between you and your child when taping events such as these. If you record an 8-year-old playing softball or performing in a play, you're likely far from the action. Look for a camcorder with excellent zoom capabilities, such as the GR-D295 ($499.95; www.jvc.com) with 25X optical zoom.

the camcorder's blinking red light. Once again, a tripod can help by letting you get away from the camcorder so that it is easier for her to forget it's there.

Bring in the pets. One of the best ways to make children comfortable when you tape them is to let them play with the family pet. We have found that putting little Rover or Snowball in the room gets very natural reactions from children. Pets tend to bring out the best in kids, so on tape you see your child's loving, curious, playful, and possibly even nurturing qualities. Even a shy child will tend to act more like herself if there is a kitten in her lap, and a rowdy kid will usually be more interested in playing with his dog than in showing off. The truth is that a dog, a cat, or even a hamster will usually hold a child's attention for a while and help her forget the camcorder is on.

Comfort Is Key

Remember that whether your child is naturally outgoing or somewhat shy, the trick to capturing great video is to help her feel at ease. With your help, your child can let her true personality shine in your videos.

BY KYLEE DICKEY

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

If other parents with small children are in your area, consider starting a neighborhood group. You can exchange recording tips, check out camcorder bags and tripods others use, and ask for help with recording problems. You can also arrange "screenings" of a different member's home movie so you can compliment what you like about the recording techniques and suggest ways to make the video more fun to watch. Such groups provide a great learning opportunity and let parents show off their kids' activities.

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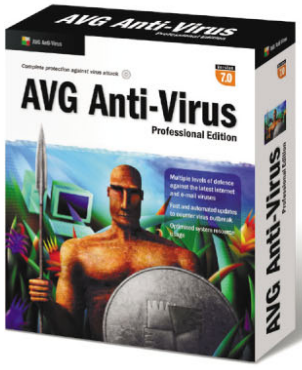

Tough on viruses, easy on users.

The Latest DVD Players

Lower Prices, More Features & Greater Capacities

Commercial DVD players hit the U.S. shores in 1997, and they cost hundreds of dollars and had limited functionality. Now, a basic player costs about as much as three DVD movies, and with higher-end models you can watch those movies and record TV shows, transfer VHS tapes onto DVD, filter questionable content, and more.

As with many new consumer electronic devices, as more people use a device, its price drops. DVD players are no exception. Toshiba's SD-3000 DVD player (one of the first DVD players to debut in the United States) costs roughly $700. Four or five years ago, a standard DVD player could cost at least $200. Today, you can walk into your local consumer electronics store and buy the no-frills Toshiba SD-3980 (www.tacp.toshiba.com), a single-disc DVD player, for a suggested retail price of $59.99.

If your budget allows, however, you might want to obtain a DVD player with more advanced features. For many consumers, it isn't enough to watch movies at home; they also want to record content for later viewing, and that's where DVD recorders come in handy.

These devices are stand-alone units that look like DVD players, but in addition to playing back your favorite movie, you can also record TV shows and sometimes other analog feed, such as video from a digital camcorder.

Today, a midlevel DVD recorder typically costs less than a DVD player of four or five years ago. For instance, the Sony

DVD Recorder RDR-GX300 ($399.95; www.sony.com) lets you record six hours of TV at a time to both rewriteable discs (DVD+RW and DVD-RW) and write-once discs (DVD+R and DVD-R).

For a DVD player that does more, look at DVD recorder/VCR combo units. These devices let you play and record DVDs, play and record VHS tapes, and transfer movies and TV shows from VHS tapes to DVD. Forget the shelves and closets full of bulky VHS tapes; transfer the content onto DVDs, and your movies will take up a lot less space. Plus, DVDs are easier to use and navigate than VHS tapes.

The GoVideo VR2940 VDV Recorder + VCR ($349.99; www.govideo.com) is one such device. With this DVD recorder, you can copy home movies onto DVDs, skip ads at the beginning of DVDs, and create eye-catching DVD covers with the help of your PC.

Another popular device is the all-in-one DVR/DVD recorder. This device plays your DVDs and records favorite TV shows, and it features a DVR (digital video recorder). DVRs, such as TiVo and its service, let you record TV shows to a hard drive, pause live TV, replay scenes you may have missed, and fast forward through commercials. As great as this service is, it lacks the ability to archive that content onto DVDs.

Enter DVR/DVD recorders. The HUMAX 40-Hour DVD Recorder with TiVo ($399.99 plus TiVo service at $12.95 month or $299 lifetime; www.humaxusa.com/products_DRT400_40.html), for instance, lets you record archived shows and movies onto DVDs, record 40 hours of TV, and schedule recordings through an Internet connection.

Honorable Mention

There are also some new DVD player technologies. One that deserves special mention is ClearPlay (www.clearplay.com). Formerly a stand-alone software program, this technology now is built into some DVD players to filter out content some viewers deem offensive, such as violence and obscenity. Introduced in mid-2004, DVD players with ClearPlay, such as the RCA DRC232N ($79 DVD player, plus $79 annually; www.clearplay.com/RCADVDPlayer.aspx), work with regular DVDs that you buy or rent.

ClearPlay technology, DVD recorders, and other technologies make it easy to watch DVDs at home. Clearly, we've come a long way from the first DVD players of nearly a decade ago.

BY HEIDI ANDERSON

Target Prices

Although prices for DVD devices vary, here's an estimate of what you can expect to pay:

- DVD Player: $50 to $150
- DVD Recorder: $170 to $800
- DVD Recorder/VCR combo unit: $250 to $500
- DVR/DVD Recorder: $0 to $500 plus subscription fees

The Lowdown On DVD Formats

Confused about what DVD format your DVD recorder accepts? This Philips Electronics' chart explains each:

DVD+R DVD+RW

Most compatible format plays in most DVD players

- Index Picture Menu
- No Initialization
- Even the R type disc can be edited
- Can record in different speeds on the same disc

DVD-R DVD-RW

Compatibility with existing DVD Players

- Requires Initialization
- Requires Finalization
- Text-only index menu
- Must record in same speed to record on a disc

DVD-RAM

Rewritable type discs

For use in DVD-RAM drives

- Cannot play in set-top DVD players or DVD-ROM drives
- No Initialization required
- No Finalization required

Courtesy of Philips Consumer Electronics

TV Types

Choose A TV That's Right For You

When purchasing a new TV, it's important to select one that fits your needs and your style. But with all the models out there, choosing a new TV can sometimes be a big job, leaving you with a big headache. Before you head over to your local electronics store to check out the TV scene, let's break down the Big Four that dominate the market today: rear-projection, CRT (cathode-ray tube), flat-panel LCD (liquid-crystal display), and flat-panel plasma.

BY LINNÉ OURADA

44-inch Panasonic PT-44LCX65 LCD Projection TV
$2,199.95
www.panasonic.com

Rear-Projection

RPTVs can be CRTs, LCDs, DLP (Digital Light Processing) TVs, or LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon) TVs. In general, RPTVs combine a projector and screen in one package. Projection TVs form a small image inside the projector and reflect it onto a large screen.

Pros: Great for large rooms; largest screen size among the Big Four, from 42- to around 80-inch screens; relatively inexpensive; function well in low light levels; offer good picture quality

Cons: Bulkiest and heaviest of all the TVs mentioned here; narrower viewing angles compared to flat-panel LCD and plasma TVs

Price: Average prices for 50- to 60-inch RPTVs are under $5,000, with CRT RPTVs on the low-end, around $1,600 and up. Expect to see prices for the other three types of RPTVs closer to an average of $3,500 to $4,500 for TVs of this size.

Outlook: Because RPTVs give the consumer the biggest bang for their buck, it is likely that these TVs will remain popular.

Who It's For: Grab your family and some popcorn because these televisions help make basements and large family rooms into great home theater environments.

CRT

Electrons aimed at a phosphor-coated screen cause it to emit light.

Pros: Relatively inexpensive; long lifespan; wide viewing angles; excellent **contrast** (the difference between dark and light on the screen)

Cons: Bulky and heavy; only available in sizes up to 42 inches; potential to cause **burn in** (images become imprinted on the screen)

Price: Average price for CRTs around 27 to 32 inches is under $500.

Outlook: Consumer electronics analyst firm iSuppli (www.isuppli.com) says CRTs make up about 90% of the current global television market and forecasts that CRTs will still account for about 70% by 2008.

Who It's For: CRTs are perfect for a student living in a college dorm room or for the kids' bedrooms at home.

27-inch Samsung TX-R2735 CRT TV
$289.99
www.samsungusa.com

46-inch Samsung LT-P468W LCD TV
$7,999.99
www.samsungusa.com

Flat-Panel LCD

Liquid crystals in a solution are manipulated by a small electrical current and made visible by a fluorescent backlight and color filter.

Pros: Lighter than CRTs; easy to wall-mount; little risk of burn-in

Cons: Relatively expensive; some have a slow response time, so fast-moving pictures don't always look crisp; poor contrast ratios

Price: Average prices are around $2,000 and up for a 30-inch screen. LCDs are more expensive per inch than plasma TVs.

Outlook: The largest LCD on the market at press time is 46 inches, but prototypes for bigger screens are being developed.

Who It's For: A small LCD TV is great for a woman who wants a TV in her kitchen where space is limited.

Flat-Panel Plasma

Plasmas work by running an electrical current through cells of gas to illuminate thousands of tiny fluorescent lights, producing a bright image.

Pros: Thin and wall-mountable; excellent picture with crisp images and no image distortion; screen sizes larger than 61 inches are in the works

Cons: Heavy and fragile when compared to LCDs; tend to run hot and use more power; susceptible to burn-in

Price: Screen sizes around 42 inches range from about $2,500 to $5,000.

Outlook: Prices are decreasing. As long as people maintain that "bigger is better," the plasma TV will continue to become more popular.

Who It's For: Plasmas are a must for the sports enthusiast who has lots of visitors on Game Day.

50-inch Pioneer PDP-5050HD PureVision Plasma TV
$7,500
www.pioneerpurevision.com

tips Speed Camcorder Response Times

1 Shop Smart

One of the greatest annoyances of using a camcorder is blowing a one-time-only shot as you fumble for the right control. Efficient shooting starts with picking the right camcorder for your hands. Good reviews may interest you in a particular model, but there's no substitute for giving it a hands-on evaluation. In the interest of miniaturization, manufacturers sometimes make products too small for their own good, with too many buttons bunched too tightly together. Conversely, a camera with a big grip may feel cumbersome to someone with small hands. If it doesn't feel comfortable in your hands, even the most full-featured camcorder isn't going to be much fun to use.

2 The Same Way You Get To Carnegie Hall

Practice, practice, practice, that is. Why do musicians and athletes run through the same routines countless times? A big part of it involves something known as body memory, which is training one's self to perform physical tasks perfectly, without having to consciously think about them. If during your video shoots there's a control that you need frequently, such as manual exposure, drill yourself with dry runs until nailing the right button feels like second nature.

3 Let Your Fingers Be Your Eyes

Card cheaters sometimes manipulate their decks in ways that are invisible to the eye but are obvious when they know what to feel for. If your camcorder has a control panel with several identical buttons that your fingertips easily mistake for one another, you can give yourself a similar tactile advantage by making one or more buttons feel different from the rest. Take something with an adhesive backing—a round rubber pad, a sticker from a label maker, etc.—and affix it onto the button. Whatever you choose should be thick enough to be noticeable but thin enough not to be unwieldy.

4 Sketch Before You Shoot

You probably have no trouble finding the shooting button and zoom control—on nearly all camcorders, they naturally fall under your right thumb and fingertips. The control panel underneath the flip-out display, however, is another story. Could you draw yours this instant, without looking at your camera? Try it and you might be surprised at how inaccurate your rendition is. Study the panel and sketch it from memory until you can consistently get it right. Once you're intimately familiar with its layout, you should be able to reduce those hunt-and-peck pauses that slow you down when the pressure's on.

5 Opt For Fewer Buttons

If all else fails, consider trading your current camcorder in on a model whose display doubles as a touchscreen interface. Touchscreen camcorders usually move controls, such as the playback buttons, off the camera body and into the virtual realm. No harm done; playback controls are for later, not for when you're busy shooting. The result is a cleaner control panel with fewer unnecessary button choices and reduced potential for error.

BY BRIAN HODGE

"When paired with a suitably high-end A/V receiver, the RBH CT-MAX will rock your home theater to its foundations."
- Steve Guttenberg, *c|net.com*

In either stereo or multichannel modes, the RBH excelled at producing a cleanly defined soundstage, with imaging uncluttered by any hint of a box or multiple drivers…The result is that the Compact Theater convincingly disappears as a sound source.
-Neil Gader, *The Perfect Vision Magazine*

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Digital Video Recorders

Make TV Work For You

Digital video recorders are widely advertised these days. Just about everyone has heard of TiVo, and you have likely seen DVRs promoted by your cable or satellite company.

Many compare the main features of a DVR to a VCR. Yes, they are similar in theory, but a DVR takes a VCR's basic functions to a more advanced level. A DVR not only records shows from TV, but it also helps you clearly see what shows are on TV, records shows to an internal hard drive instead of a cassette, and offers additional features such as instant replay and the ability to pause live TV.

Once you decide to get a DVR, you have a lot of options in terms of what to buy and what subscription to get. Here, we'll show you what DVRs are all about, argue the options for owning and leasing a DVR, discuss cable or satellite vs. standalone DVR options, and tell you what you need in order to use a DVR in your home.

DVR Features

Some people want a DVR so they can skip commercials during "Survivor," but others want to record all episodes from "The West Wing" to archive them to DVD for long-term storage. Fortunately, many models of DVRs are out there; one is bound to meet your needs.

Fave features. On all DVRs, you can pause live TV. When you press pause, the DVR begins recording the show to the DVR's hard drive and then resumes the show from memory when you return. Some DVR services show you program guides, which contain a list of shows and times, up to two weeks in advance, and some services let you schedule recordings from the guide online. In addition to guide-based recording, both TiVo (www.tivo.com) and ReplayTV (www.replaytv.com) offer the ability to search by actor, subject matter, title, or director.

Most DVRs offer a 30- or 60-minute pause buffer. ReplayTV stands out from the crowd with an especially good version of this feature. ReplayTV's DVRs can store as much content as can fit on its unused hard drive space. For example, if you purchase ReplayTV's 320-hour model, you could pause TV for literally 13 days. While that may be excessive, knowing that you can pick up watching the show from the second you left regardless of a time limit is comforting knowledge when your sister's quick phone call turns into a lengthy discourse.

Know your way around a DVR. DVR manufacturers describe various models by how many hours of programming they can store at a time. Devices are available with 30 to 320 hours of recording space (see the "DVR Services" chart for specific examples from several popular companies). However, the level of quality at which you record your show greatly affects these numbers (a DVR stores much less content if you record at a high-quality setting or as a high-definition program).

The number of hours listed on your DVR is based on the amount of hard drive storage space in the device and the average amount of storage space used per hour of recorded programming. If you fill your DVR to capacity, it may hold more or less than the specified amount. However, you can delete a program to free space for more recording capability.

Comcast & TiVo

You may have read about a Comcast's plan to offer TiVo service to all of its customers by the end of 2006. We spoke with Chris Ellis, Comcast's corporate communications manager to get the scoop.

First, current subscribers will not have to get a new DVR box and set up their TV, sound system, and cable connections again. Current Comcast users will be given the option, through their Comcast on-screen interface, to download the TiVo program guide and search features. Alternately, they can ignore the download option and continue using the Comcast interface.

Currently, TiVo doesn't offer support for recording HDTV programs, but Comcast does. According to Ellis, HD customers will retain recording capabilities on all of their HD channels regardless of the interface they choose because the customers with Comcast's HD service already have the hardware in their DVR units that is necessary for recording HD programs.

One factor that has not been decided yet is what fee Comcast will charge to use the TiVo interface vs. the existing Comcast interface. Customers can expect more information on fees in their region as the company makes the TiVo option available in their area. ●

Because DVRs offer similar services but don't all present them to you in the same way, we recommend you try a few at local stores or through online demos to get a feel for what works best for you.

Own Or Lease Your DVR

Let's face it; there are so many commercials and ads out there about DVRs and DVR services that it can get pretty confusing to figure out what you'll have to buy and when. You have the choice of buying a DVR box from a manufacturer or leasing or buying one from your cable or satellite provider. You own or lease the DVR based on each provider's program. For example, from Comcast (www.comcast.com), you could lease a DVR, such as Motorola's DCT-6412 High-Definition Dual-Tuner Video Recorder Set-Top, one of its most popular units, for a monthly charge of $9.95 total (in most markets) for both the unit and the services, but you would buy a device from DirecTV (devices start at $99; www.directv.com) and pay a monthly fee of $4.99 for the DVR service.

Standalone DVRs, such as TiVo and ReplayTV, operate independently of your cable or satellite provider. Most standalone DVRs can accommodate any type of television signal—antenna, satellite, and cable. If you move or decide to change your satellite or cable company, your standalone DVR will still function with your system because it can work with or without your cable or satellite connection. However, if you own your DVR box, in some cases you'll still need to pay a monthly fee for your DVR service. For example, if you buy a TiVo model, you have to pay $12.95 per month if you want TiVo Plus DVR service. Other standalone DVRs, such as Toshiba's RS-TX20 ($599.99; www.toshiba.com), let you buy the DVR unit with no monthly service fee because the DVR already includes TiVo Basic service. (TiVo Plus offers more extensive features than TiVo Basic, which comes free with some units.)

Buying a DVR will initially cost you more, but this option may work for you. Some DVR companies, such as Replay TV, offer customers the option of buying a DVR unit and then paying a one-time fee for a lifetime subscription to the DVR service in lieu of monthly leasing charges (this is for the lifetime of the unit, not *your* lifetime).

A leased system may be a better choice if you upgrade often. With a leased DVR, you can request a new device with improved technology as it becomes available. However, if monthly charges for a leased DVR increase, you will have to pay the additional fees, whereas if you paid a lifetime subscription, you won't have to pay additional fees unless your DVR breaks and you need to replace it.

What You Need & When

A DVR isn't a home entertainment device you can just plug in and start using. If it is a standalone unit, you first have to connect it to a number of other devices, such as your cable or satellite box and your sound system. Some models will need a phone line or an Internet connection so the DVR can provide you with an updated daily program guide.

A cable provider's DVR updates programming information through the cable system. Because it doesn't need additional connections to get information, you can just connect it to your television and sound system. Most satellite systems with a built-in DVR require access to a phone line to update the program guide.

Your DVR's Future

As DVR technology and competition within the industry continue to evolve, consumers can expect the amount of DVR unit options and services to increase. Keep up-to-date about upgrades to your DVR by occasionally checking your service provider's Web site. ce

BY DACIA L. ROLANDO

HD Decisions

Unfortunately, not all DVRs are equipped to record high-definition television. An HD-compatible system will be an important addition if your home entertainment system already includes HD. Most DVRs that are equipped to record HDTV are costly. DirecTV's HD-DVR system starts at $699, compared to $99 for the version without HD support. DISH Network offers its DVR 942 (www.dishnetwork.com) standalone DVR for $699, which has HD capabilities and a two-tuner receiver that gives you multi-room viewing options. However, some cable companies, such as Comcast, offer leased HD models that are comparable in cost to their non-HD models. ●

DVR Services

	TiVo (www.tivo.com)	**ReplayTv** (www.replaytv.com)	**Cox** (www.cox.com)	**DISH Network** (www.dishnetwork.com)	**Comcast** (www.comcast.com)
Monthly Subscription Fee	$12.95**	$12.95**	$4.95	$4.98	$9.95
Lifetime Subscription	$299	$299	N/A	N/A	N/A
Unit Price Ranges	$199.99/$299.99/ $349.99 for TiVo Series2	$149.99/$299.99/ $449.99 for 5500 Series	$9.95 per month rental	$299 to $699; includes satellite receiver. Or, lease unit for no charge besides monthly subscription fee.	Unit provided with fee but must be returned on cancellation.
Number Of Hours Of Standard Programming	40/80/140	40/80/160	Up to 50	60 to 180	Up to 90
Need Phone Line For Setup Or Program Guide Access?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

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Room To Grow

DVRs With Space To Spare

We love how DVRs (digital video recorders) give us TV on our terms. With a DVR, you can easily record live TV (on a schedule or a whim) and watch it when you have time. There are no tapes, no discs, and no complicated programming processes. Select the shows from a menu and the DVR records them to its hard drive. What happens when that hard drive gets full? We found some large-capacity DVRs that provide even more room for TV the way you want it.

For this roundup, we limited our attention to models with 100GB of storage (roughly 100 hours of programming at basic quality levels). One model, the Humax T2500 ($699.99; www.humaxusa.com), offers an impressive 300GB. (Capacity varies based on the recording quality; read the "Time & Space" sidebar for a rundown on what capacities you can expect at various recording levels.)

We developed a few categories to help you determine the best fit for your needs. Some high-capacity DVRs focus on recording TV, doing it well, and providing

an easy user interface. Others combine impressive features, including HD decoding and storage, DVD recording, and satellite service reception.

We found models with loads of storage, the renowned TiVo service and user interface, and affordable prices. TiVo's Series2 line has a 140GB model ($349.99; www.tivo.com), which is inexpensive, easy to use, and has plenty of storage.

But the reigning queen of high-capacity DVRs is the Humax T2500. Its 300GB hard drive is the largest we've seen in a consumer-level standalone DVR. That amount of storage lets you record about 250 hours of programming. That's enough to record 125 movies (every animated Disney feature twice), every episode of "Friends" and "Will & Grace" ever aired, or all the scheduled coverage of the 2006 Winter Olympics.

The T2500 uses the subscription-based TiVo Series2 interface and 14-day programming guide ($12.95 per month or a $299 one-time fee). TiVo systems are easy to set up and navigate: Plug your TV feed (antenna, cable, or satellite) into the DVR and connect the DVR to your TV using the included color-coded cables. Connect the T2500 to a phone line, step through the setup wizard, and start watching. You can pause or rewind live TV, schedule recording 14 days in advance, or set up a Season Pass to automatically record every airing of a given show.

HD Storage

If you already have an HDTV or are thinking about upgrading to an HD set, consider a DVR that stores HD-quality content. The LG LST-3410A ($999; us.lge.com), which we've seen and liked, is a standout. It includes an HD tuner, so you don't need a separate device to pick up free HD broadcasts via antenna. You can choose HD or a variety of SD (standard definition) quality levels for each recording session. You decide whether a show is worth HD recording's extra storage space.

The LST-3410A has 120GB of hard drive storage, so you can record 120 hours at broadcast TV quality, 62 hours of digital SD programming, or 12.5 hours of HD material. Image quality, especially at high-definition, is great in live and recorded formats; however, anytime you record, store, or play back something, you may lose quality. The *TV Guide* On Screen (www.tvgos.com) programming guide sets itself up automatically and is easy to use. *TV Guide* On Screen provides eight days of programming specific to your provider (cable, satellite, or antenna). Enter your ZIP code and programming package and the system does the rest. You can browse and schedule recordings as soon as they appear in the listing, so you don't have to worry about getting home in time for the show. The LST-3410A's slim silver case is unobtrusive and the controls are intuitive. As an HD model, the LST-3410A also has one of the more comprehensive sets of connectors we've seen, from HD-compatible DVI and component jacks to standard-definition S-Video and composite connectors. No matter what your video and audio setup, this unit has the right outputs.

Two For One

One limitation of traditional DVRs is that they include just one TV tuner, which means you'll have to watch what you're recording, unless you know how to set up a cable splitter or use another workaround. Typically, you can't record two shows at once, either, unless you have a dual-tuner DVR. With two TV tuners, accepting dual inputs, you can watch one channel and record another, hook up multiple TV sources (satellite and antenna, for instance), and record two shows at once.

We couldn't find any retail dual-tuner DVRs, so you'll need to look at satellite provider models (such as the Dish Network DISH Player-DVR 942) or DVR-capable cable boxes (such as the DCT-6412 from Motorola, available through more than a dozen cable providers). You may or may not have a choice of DVR models (depending on your provider), and you may or may not have a choice of cable provider (though satellite systems are almost always an option).

Unless you choose the right provider, or are willing to wait, a dual-tuner DVR may not be in your future just yet. But keep an eye out for more models down the road. ●

Time & Space

No doubt about it, 100GB sounds like a lot of capacity. Here's what you may expect to fit on the drives of various sizes:

	Long-Play Mode (Lowest Quality)	High-Quality Mode (DVD Quality)	High-Definition Mode* (HDTV Quality)
100GB	100 hours	30 hours	10 hours
120GB	120 hours	35.5 hours	12.5 hours
160GB	135 hours	62.5 hours	16 hours
300GB	250 hours	80 hours	30 hours

*HD recording and playback not available in all models

Model Roundup

If you're shopping for a large-capacity DVR, you have plenty of options. Here are the models we looked at for this article.

TiVo Series2	120GB	$349.99	www.tivo.com	Most affordable
Humax T2500	300GB	$699.99	www.humaxusa.com	Largest capacity
LG LST-3410A	120GB	$999	us.lge.com	HD-capable
Toshiba RX-S34	160GB	$499.99	www.tacp.toshiba.com	DVD recorder
Dish Network DISH Player-DVR 942	250GB	$699	www.dishnetwork.com	Dual-tuner HD satellite receiver

Lots of recording capacity is one thing, but the ability to archive recordings to DVD provides essentially unlimited storage. Toshiba's RX-S34 ($499.99; www.tacp.toshiba.com) includes a 160GB hard drive (135 hours of storage in long play mode), as well as a multiformat DVD recorder. The drive plays regular movie DVDs and music CDs too, saving shelf space. When the hard drive fills up, save a group of recordings (an entire season of "CSI", a handful of Audrey Hepburn movies, or all of your daughter's favorite cartoons) to a disc and collect anew. You can archive to DVD-R/RWs (DVD-recordable/DVD-rewriteable) for playback in most DVD players (including the RX-S34).

The RX-S34's controls are more complicated and less intuitive than other models we've seen, but it does more (TV, DVR, DVD, CD) than other models. Switching back and forth between TV, hard drive playback, and DVD functions takes some getting used to, so spend time with the users manual. Toshiba also uses the *TV Guide* On Screen programming guide, populating eight days of upcoming programming without a subscription or phone line connection.

Built-In Hard Drives

The fastest-growing segment of the DVR market is set-top boxes in which cable or satellite providers incorporate hard drives and DVRs. Usually available for a nominal monthly fee (about $10 a month, without extra subscriptions or hardware), the rental model avoids upfront costs. Rather than picking a make and model that fits your needs, you'll have to choose from what your programming provider makes available.

For instance, several DirecTV receivers feature TiVo's service, but most set-top devices use the cable or satellite company's programming system. Most providers offer DVR set-top boxes and receivers to their subscribers. Some providers offer several large-capacity (greater than 100GB) DVR models. (Some offer none.) Dish Network's DISH Player-DVR 942 ($699; www.dishnetwork.com) lets you record 250GB of programs (25 hours of HD content; 180 of SD), with support for two TV sets and a programming guide covering nine days at a time.

Larger hard drives are great, but what matters is what you can do with them. Instead of buying a season of your favorite show on DVD and waiting a year or more for it to be released, why not record each episode as it airs and build the collection yourself? You can record every episode of a variety of series, creating a comprehensive library. Such extensive storage is possible with today's large-capacity DVRs. The extra features on some of the models we look at add HD storage, DVD recording, or integrated satellite reception. So, no matter what your needs, you won't run out of space. ce

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

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TV On Your PC

Record Television Shows To Your Computer

Two of the more important electronic devices in many homes are PCs and TVs, and generally, they are distinct pieces of equipment with distinct functions. You typically use your TV to watch shows and movies and your computer to, well, compute.

But the line has been blurring for quite a while. For several years now, we've been able to surf the Internet on our televisions through WebTV (and more recently through Microsoft's MSN TV service). And now we can record television shows via our PCs. That's right—DVRs (digital video recorders) aren't just for TVs. These days, you can buy PCs with built-in DVR capabilities, or you can turn your PC into a DVR, thanks to a new wave of hardware and software.

Video-Editing Software

You've taken the time to record television shows to your PC, so why not make the most of them and edit out those annoying commercials? You can't do this with a Windows Media Center PC (its proprietary format doesn't allow such editing), but you can if you use other software and hardware. You might consider one of the following video-editing programs: Ulead VideoStudio 9 ($99.99; www.ulead.com), Sonic Solutions Roxio Easy Media Creator 7.5 ($99.95; www.roxio.com), and Pinnacle Studio Version 9 ($79.99; www.pinnaclesys.com). ●

Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005

A Windows Media Center PC is a computer that runs a special version of the Windows XP OS. Its high-end, multimedia components, including powerful video cards, a rich-sounding speaker system, a high-speed processor, and lots of system memory, allow it to function as a home entertainment hub. WinXP Media Center Edition 2005 is the latest version of this particular OS, and, for example, you can use it to create slideshows from your digital photos or create home movies and archive them on DVDs.

The most innovative features, however, are related to television. Most Media Center PCs are equipped with TV tuners, so you can record live television—up to three shows at once, depending on the setup—and play back those shows you've recorded to your PC. In addition, you can burn these shows to DVD or transfer them to portable media devices.

Configuring this system is relatively uncomplicated. Set up the PC as you would any other PC and plug a TV output connection on your PC to the input on your TV. The PC's interface will look almost the same as that of a WinXP Pro PC, with the exception of a Media Center icon. Click the Media Center icon using your mouse or press the Media Center button on the remote control, and the WinXP MCE interface appears. Navigate to the My TV menu selection, where you may watch live TV, view recorded TV, browse movies, and more.

Recording live television is a fairly simple process. Click a button to open the on-screen program guide, highlight the program you wish to record, and click the OK button on the remote control. Once the program has been recorded, use the WinXP MCE interface to play back the program by browsing the intuitive Recorded TV menu, which lets you sort by date or title. You can also click the Create CD/DVD button to record your favorite shows and hand them to your friends and family members.

Depending on your hardware setup, you can record and watch multiple programs simultaneously. If you have one TV tuner, you can watch a recorded show while recording a live one. And the television aficionados who invest in more than one TV tuner can watch a live show while recording another live show in the background.

Sound enticing? If you're ready for your first Media Center PC, keep in mind that while it is possible to upgrade your current system, it entails some hefty system requirements. If you're willing to invest in a new PC, however, you'll be able to

find one ready-made from more than a dozen manufacturers, such as the HP Media Center m7070n Photosmart PC ($1,249.99; www.hp.com) or the new Gateway 9410XL Media Center PC (price unavailable at press time; www.gateway.com). You'll find a list of retailers on the Microsoft Web site at www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/mediacenter/howtobuy.

Other DVR Options

Media Center PCs aren't the only option for recording TV programs with your PC. You can customize your current PC by adding hardware and/or software, as well.

Television On The Go

You recorded a television program because you didn't have time to watch it when it was on, and now you're on the go again. What can you do with those TV shows you haven't had time to sit down and watch? Take them with you. If you used Windows Media Center to record TV to your PC, you can transfer the recordings to a PMC (Portable Media Center) device, a handheld device that plays music, displays pictures, and plays back video. PMCs run the Microsoft Windows Mobile OS, and examples include the Creative Zen Portable Media Center ($499.99; www.creative.com) and the Samsung YH-999 Portable Media Center ($499.99; www.samsung.com). The latter contains a 20GB hard drive, which will hold approximately 20 hours of TV shows if you record at the lowest WinXP MCE quality level and seven hours if you record at the highest. ●

Media Center PCs aren't the only option for recording TV programs with your PC.

For example, ATI makes a series of products for watching and recording TV via a PC. The All-In-Wonder 9600 ($199; www.ati.com) is a graphics card with which you can record and pause TV, record FM radio programs, and more. Install the video card with the help of the installation CD, connect your TV cable to your PC, and begin surfing your television listings. When you're watching live TV, you may need to leave the room: Press the Pause button on the remote control and, when you return, press the Play button to pick up where you left off. Because the program records to your PC's hard drive, you won't miss a thing.

Upgrade Your PC

If you're planning to turn your current PC into a DVR, make sure its components are up to the task. There's no point in installing DVR hardware and software on your PC if your computer is too slow to display the latest episode of your favorite prime time drama. Here are some guidelines for recommended minimum system requirements:

Microprocessor: Pentium 4

Processor Speed: 1GHz

RAM: 256MB

Hard Drive: 40GB

OS: WinXP Home

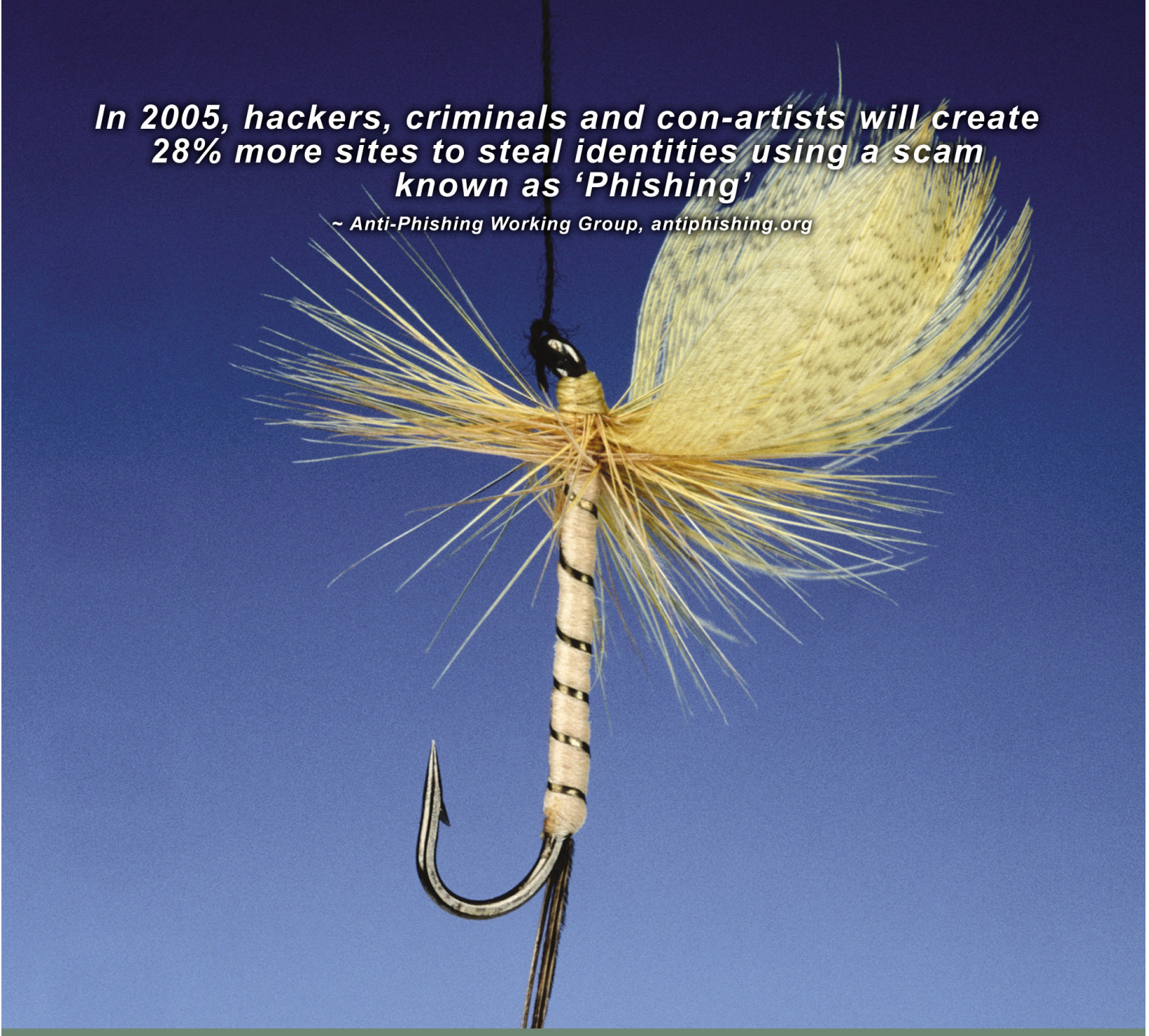
Record a program by calling up the channel guide and scrolling through the listings or by using the search engine. To play back a program, use a cool feature called THRUVIEW, which creates a small, translucent viewing area on your Desktop. If you're working on a word processing document, for instance, the video sits on top of it and plays in the corner of the desktop. It's similar to the picture-in-picture feature on a TV, except that the smaller picture is see-through.

If you already have a TV tuner card and substantial video adapter, you can turn your PC into a DVR by installing a software program. SnapStream Media Beyond TV 3 ($69.99; www.snapstream.com) lets you record multiple shows, watch one show while recording another, search for a show to record by title or keyword, record an entire TV series, and schedule recordings over the Internet. Beyond TV 3 requires a video card that is NVIDIA GeForce 2 and above, ATI Graphics Radeon 7500 and above, or another with 16MB RAM, 3D Acceleration, and DirectX 9.0 compatibility.

The DVR-PC Advantage

Using your PC to record TV shows has several advantages over a standalone DVR. A key one is the lack of subscription fees for a service such as TiVo, which costs $12.95 per month or $299 lifetime. Although it may seem pricey to plunk down $1,000 (or much more) for a Media Center PC or $200 to upgrade your current PC to DVR readiness, the cash layout is a one-time deal. ce

BY HEIDI ANDERSON



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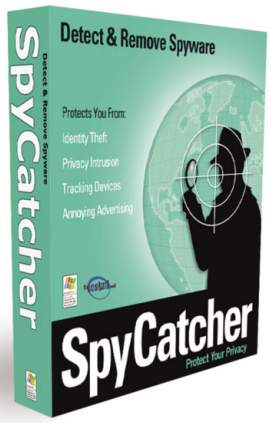

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Record & Burn

With DVR/DVD Recorders, You Can Watch Your Shows & Keep Them Too

Every now and then, a technology emerges that captures the attention and loyalties of so many consumers that its name becomes larger than life. Such is the case with TiVo, a digital video recording service from TiVo, Inc. (www.tivo.com). Thanks to its ease of use and a memorable Super Bowl halftime "wardrobe malfunction," which TiVo users "rewound" in record numbers, its name has become a verb among those who use it—and those who wish they had it.

Though a pioneer in the field of digital recording, TiVo is not the only digital recording service on the market. Nor are TiVo-branded DVD recorders, from Humax and Toshiba, the only good units out there.

To help you decide which features best meet your needs, we'll take a close look at three recorders so you can do a little comparison shopping, plus give you a peek at models that just hit the market.

Philips HDRW720

This higher-end model from Philips (www.philips.com) comes fully loaded. And at $599.99, it should. The first impressive feature is its massive 120GB hard drive, which can hold about 190 hours of recorded content. With the touch of a button, you can record, edit, and write programming to DVD+RW/Rs. The recorder will automatically write the content to the disc at the same quality/speed at which you recorded it, but you can change the setting. You can watch one recorded program while recording another and pause, go back, and view previous parts of a program even as you continue to record it. You also can employ a parental control feature to block children from viewing inappropriate content.

If you use a rewriteable disc to save a program you want to keep, you can use the protection feature on this recorder to prevent the disc from being written over in the future. In addition to writing and playing back the two formats already mentioned, this model will play DVDs and DVD-R/RWs, plus audio and video CDs.

The one downside to this model is that the learning curve to mastering its many features is steep, especially if you're new to using a DVR. Connecting the recorder, which is roughly 3 x 17 x 13 inches (HxWxD), doesn't take long. But setting up the recorder so that it's compatible with your local cable system and programming the *TV Guide* On Screen (www.tvgos.com) system is time-consuming.

Still, this model's complexity doesn't detract from the many tasks you can use this recorder for. If you need a DVR to record and edit lots of content, including that from your camcorder, you'll do well with a higher-end model like this one.

DVRs & Legal Issues

Everywhere you look you see ads for DVD sets that contain a season's worth of a TV series. But why shell out $30 to $40 or more for those episodes when you have a DVR?

Prepackaged DVD sets often have bonus content without commercials. You won't get the extra content, but with the right DVR, you can edit out the commercials and still have your programs for posterity. So, there's a tradeoff: For example, spend $99.98 on the just-released DVD set of season five of "The Sopranos," which includes the extra content, or record it yourself for the cost of the DVDs and edit out the commercials.

The biggest consideration, however, is whether or not you are legally prohibited from burning DVDs of broadcast network and cable programming. Paul Muto, a spokesman for Humax and president and COO of Muto Communications, a New York-based PR firm that specializes in consumer electronics products, says he is unaware of any legal restrictions placed on consumers, either by services such as TiVo, broadcast companies, or movies studios, as long as you record content for your own personal use.

TiVo's Jessica Van Pernis backs that up. "There are no restrictions that TiVo places on what you're recording for your own personal use," she says. ●

Humax DRT400 DVD Recorder With TiVo

Following the release of its 80-hour capacity DRT800 recorder ($499.99; www.humaxusa.com), Humax recently rolled out the DRT400 ($399.99), a DVR with a 40-hour capacity hard drive. Like its big brother, this model offers some valuable features.

First and foremost is that you can run the TiVo service through the recorder. According to TiVo Spokeswoman Jessica Van Pernis, DVRs that are manufactured specifically to run TiVo can do so. To activate TiVo and run the Guided Setup, you'll initially need to connect the DVR to a phone jack. After setup is complete, you can keep the DVR connected to TiVo either through a phone jack or a broadband connection. Occasionally, TiVo automatically updates its service, so you'll need either a phone or broadband connection at all times—something to consider as you configure your entertainment system.

That leads us to a second major benefit: Because it's part of the TiVo Series2 lineup of DVRs, you can use the DRT400's home media features to connect to your wired or wireless home network. Doing so lets you set up multi-room viewing options, whereby you record a program in one room and view it in another, provided you have a Series2 DVR in each room. It also allows you to use your TV and stereo to enjoy photo and music files stored on your PC.

A subscription to TiVo costs $12.95 a month or $299 for the life of the DVR. TiVo's new Multi-Service Discount plan lets you add up to five additional TiVo boxes in your home on the same account for $6.95 per month per additional box. If for some reason you want separate accounts in your home, then each would cost $12.95 a month. For the price, you get several easy-to-use features. One is the WishList search tool, which you can use to

find programming based on the name of an actor, director, or sports team, for example. Another is the Now Playing screen, from which you pick programs you've recorded. You can watch recorded content even as you record something else.

This DVR, at 16.5 x 13 x 3 inches, works with a variety of CDs and DVDs, including DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-R, and CD-RW. It has a fully functional progressive scan DVD player. At press time, TiVo had announced that the DRT400 and DRT800 recorders would, by summer's end, be compatible with TiVoToGo, a tool that lets you transfer recorded programs to your PC or portable media center.

Panasonic DMR-ES10

This economical model, which debuted in April at $199.95, is a good option for anyone who wants digital recording capabilities but not all the extra features. It doesn't have an on-screen program guide or a hard drive—tools found in Panasonic's DMR-EH50 ($449.95; www.panasonic.com)—but gives you one-touch recording capabilities. You can view the beginning of a program even as it's still being recorded or watch a program you recorded earlier while recording another. When scheduling a recording, you can choose one of five modes: from XP (highest quality but gobbles up disc space) to FR (flexible recording, in which the DVR selects the quality based on the space left on the DVD).

One nifty feature is that the DMR-ES10 easily connects to a VCR, letting you make DVDs from programs you've recorded to VHS tapes. You also can hook up this DVR to a camcorder or a cable or satellite box. This gives you many options for recording and playback at a very affordable price.

This slimmer, lighter model (2 x 17 x 13 inches) plays and writes to DVD-RAM, DVD-R, DVD-RW, and DVD+R and plays DVD-RW, DVD-A, DVD-R1/+1, DVD-RW1/+RW1, and DVD-Vs. You also can use it to play MP3 files or view JPEGs (Joint Photographic Experts Group) stored on CD-R/RWs.

Coming Soon

We wanted to get our hands on one more DVR, but Sony hadn't released its newest midpriced DVR, the RDR-GX315, at press time. This recorder writes to DVD+RW, DVD-RW, DVD+R, and DVD-Rs, features parental controls and child locks, offers instant search and replay tools, plays CDs, displays JPEG images, and has an i.LINK (similar to FireWire) interface for Digital8 and DV camcorders.

Sony also just introduced two high-definition DVRs with hard drives: the DHG-HDD500 ($999.99), which can record a minimum of 60 hours in high-def, and the DHG-HDD250 ($799.99), which can record at least 30 hours in high def.

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

What About Generic DVRs?

Cable companies are one of the best sources from which to obtain a low-cost or free "generic" DVR. Phillip Swann, president of TVPredictions.com, forecasted late last year that in 2005 cable companies would see millions of new subscribers to their DVR services.

One big disadvantage to this type of DVR is that many don't offer networking features, such as connecting to your broadband service, a PC, or other DVRs in your home. Another disadvantage is that these DVRs likely don't include a DVD recorder, so you have no mechanism for burning what you record to a disc. They likely connect to such a unit, but that means having an extra piece of hardware and more cables to mess with.

If you can live without those features, a cable DVR is a good low-cost option, especially if space is at a premium. Some DVRs, such as those from Time Warner Cable, are built into the set-top box consumers need to receive digital cable programming. Monthly DVR service from Time Warner is $4.95, plus $7.65 monthly for the set-top box. According to Swann, most cable companies in the United States that offer DVR services do so for less than $10 a month.

Editor's Top 10

Reasons I Love These Devices

CE Lifestyles editor Katie Sommer digs in for a relaxing night of catching up on her TV must-sees after she shares why DVRs are almost as cool as the EDAX machine from "CSI: New York."

1 Unexpected long nights at the office don't mean you have to miss "Scrubs."

2 Who doesn't like a bargain? You can often get a DVR for a steal (sometimes for free!) by going through your cable or satellite provider.

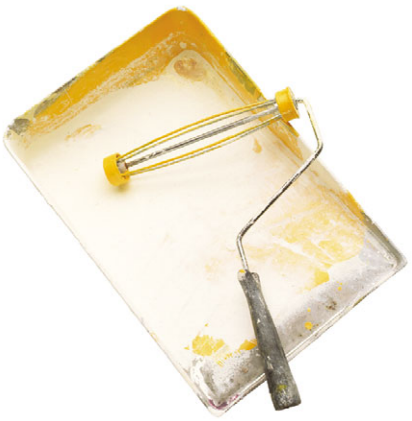
3 If you forget why Noah, Meadow's boyfriend on "The Sopranos," unwisely breaks up with her, you can skip back to episode 32 for a recap.

4 Setting up a recording schedule on your DVR is much easier than programming a VCR.

5 You can pause a live broadcast of "Fast Food My Way" when you need to catch up with Jacques Pépin and his signature coq au vin.

6 With the proper DVR setup, you can edit out the commercials of an entire season of "ER" and then archive it to DVD for your own homemade box set.

7 The little TiVo character is really kind of cute, even in your living room.



8 If you have a hard drive big enough, you can record every episode of "Design On A Dime" and refer to them whenever you feel the DIY urge.

9 If you want less clutter in your living room, you can invest in a PC with Windows Media Center and use its built-in DVR tools instead.

10 You no longer have to choose between "Crossing Jordan" and "Grey's Anatomy" on Sunday nights—record both with a dual-tuner DVR.

Tips

Manage Your DVR's Quality Settings

Question Quality Options

Quality control settings on your DVR let you manage its storage capabilities. In some DVR models, a low-quality recording can use as little as a third of the storage space as the same program recorded with a high-quality setting. However, not all DVRs have multiple settings for quality control. If you want a DVR with several quality options, ask questions before you buy. Find out if your choices have quality options and how many settings are available.

Skip The Skipping

You invested in your home entertainment system to enjoy high-quality picture and sound. Don't jeopardize those features when it matters. Choose a high-quality setting when recording programs with action or rapid transitions. Your DVR records your selection by saving the digital version of a frame from a film reel. A high-quality recording stores more frames per second, providing smooth transitions and uninterrupted action. Sporting events, action movies, and anything with rapid movement may have jumpy or choppy playback if you record it at a low-quality setting.

Basic Quality For Basic Shows

Some programs, such as the nightly news, do not have a lot of motion from frame to frame. Usually the anchor sits in a stationary position and the only major movement happens during transitions to reporters in the field or back to the newsroom. The DVR does not need to store as much data when there is not much movement or action on-screen, so you can record these types of programs at a lower quality setting without the risk of erratic playback.

High Quality Is Not Always High Definition

Not all DVRs are capable of recording a high-definition program. If your DVR does not have the right tuner, recording an HD channel, even on a high-quality setting, will not work, so check HD capabilities before you buy. When you record an HD program, expect to use more storage space than when you record a program with basic quality settings: High-definition recordings can use up to four times as much storage space, filling your 100-hour DVR with just 25 hours of HD programming.

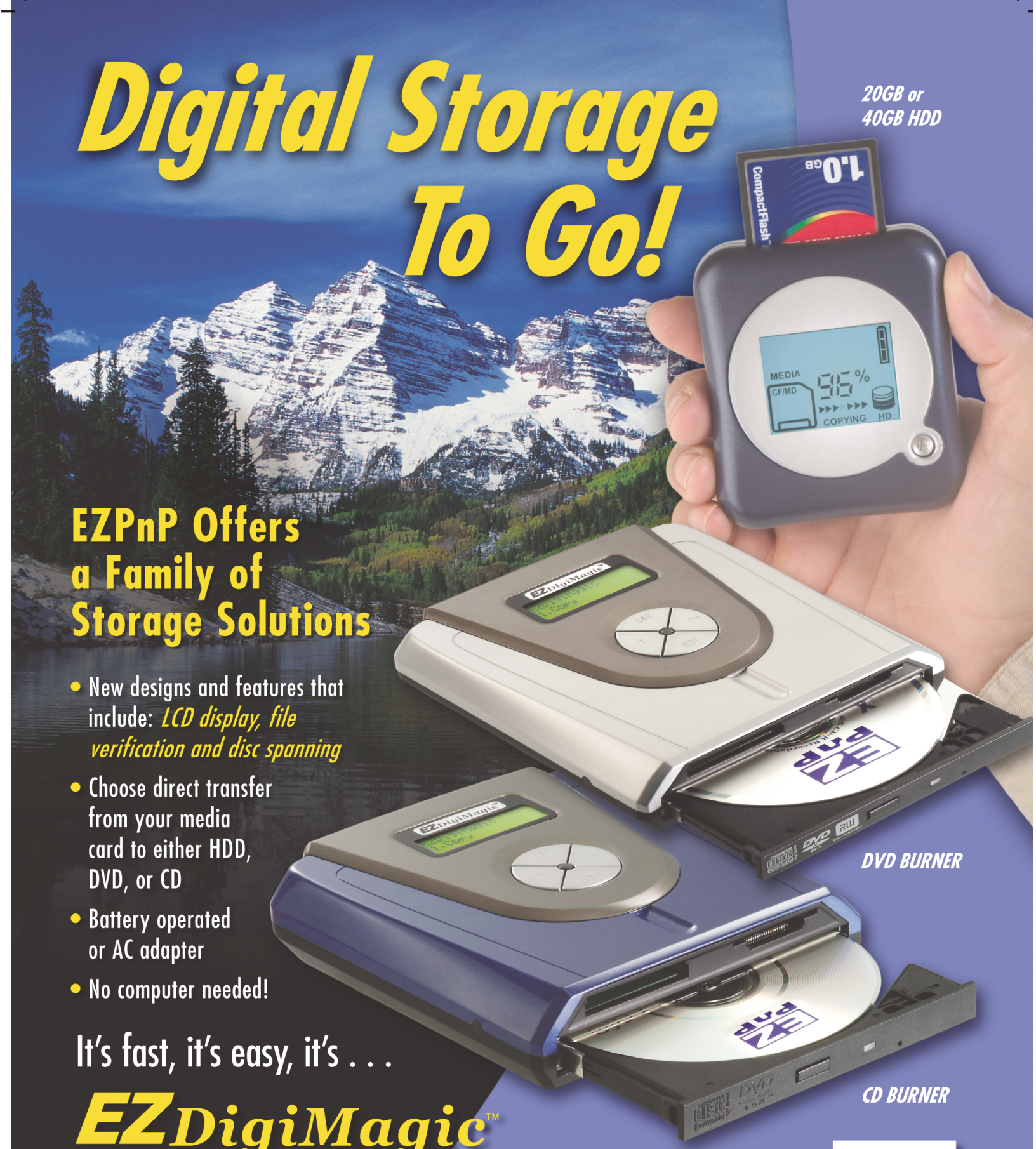
Transfer To Long-Term Storage

Most DVRs claim they are not long-term storage devices. However, many offer ways to transfer your recordings to other devices, such as a home media server or a PC, for storage. Transferring programs to permanent storage frees up space on your DVR without you losing the ability to watch your show. If you take advantage of these long-term storage options, you may prefer to use a high-quality setting when you record the show to your DVR.

BY DACIA L. ROLANDO

Digital Storage To Go!

20GB or 40GB HDD



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Roam For The Holidays

Take Your Digital Camera Overseas

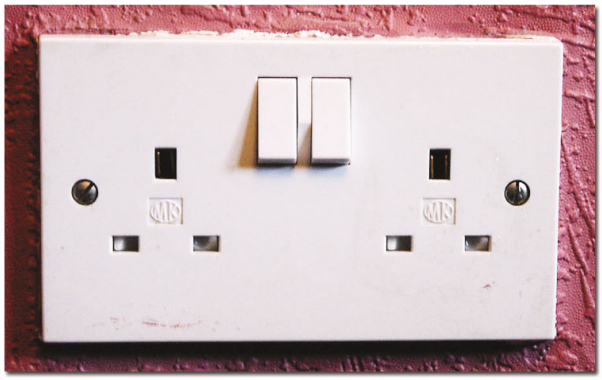
As a nation founded by immigrants, we've always had wanderlust in our blood . . . and many of us still have our sights fixed on distant shores. According to the most recent statistics from the U.S. Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, around 28 million Americans headed across the oceans in 2004. Business travel is in the minority; while there's some overlap, four out of every five travelers took off to see the sights or visit friends and family.

By far, the most popular destination is Europe, which lured more than 12 million of us last year. If the mere mention of Stonehenge and the Piazza San Marco sparks your imagination, you may soon be one of them.

Digital cameras are ideal to take on overseas vacations. As long as you have a roomy memory card, you can click away and not worry about burning up film on redundant shots. With some forethought, you can come back from this photo safari with images you'll prize for a lifetime.

Ramblin' cam. Unless you plan to haul along steamer trunks and lodge in a castle, overseas travel forces you to limit and sometimes miniaturize your essentials.

To learn if you can use a device overseas with nothing more than a plug adapter, check its input rating. This Nikon battery charger is dual voltage and thus good to go.



In the United Kingdom, this is the electrical outlet that passes for normal, so be prepared.

BoomerangIt and Trackitback use individually coded labels to help reunite you with your lost goods.

This includes your camera. You may love your Nikon D70 or Canon EOS 20D—and for good reason; they shoot gorgeous pictures—but one thing digital SLRs (single-lens reflex) are not is compact. You may want to invest in a sleeker unit for vacations, taking the following criteria into account:

- It must be rugged and compact enough to carry and pack conveniently.
- It has to take great pictures, from scenic views to close-ups.
- It can't be so expensive that, if it were lost or stolen, you'd want to hang yourself from the Eiffel Tower.

One worthy contender (we'll list a few others later) is the Canon PowerShot A520 ($279; www.canonusa.com). It's compact enough to carry with ease (2.5 x 3.6 x 1.5 inches [HxWxD]), shoots to SD (Secure Digital) cards or MMCs (MultiMediaCards), and with 4MP (megapixel) resolution, it captures enough detail for film-quality prints up to 8 inches x 10 inches.

In addition to more than a dozen shooting modes and other features is a 4X optical zoom, which covers a good amount of ground. Another travel perk is that it runs off two AA batteries: rechargeable NiMHs (nickel-metal hydride) or regular alkaline, which you can find just about anywhere. Finally, Canon offers a range of accessories for the PowerShot A520, including a waterproof case and add-on lens converters (wide angle, telephoto, and close-up), so you can further customize the camera to adapt to particular types of shooting you may anticipate.

BY BRIAN HODGE

At The Security Gate

Due to the risk of pilfering by baggage handlers, we recommend that you forego packing your camera and other gadgets in your check-in luggage and keep them in a carry-on bag. Although airport X-ray machines can still damage photographic film (rolls should be checked through by hand), screening poses no threat to electronics and digital media, such as memory cards.

Still, terrorism concerns mean close scrutiny of carry-on items, particularly electronic items, which could be hollowed out to contain weapons. Although it's a good idea to consolidate electronics in one bag, don't expect them to sail through screening in a packed jumble. You'll likely have to unpack your gadgets and spread them out in plastic bins so the screener gets an unobstructed look. Inspectors may also require you to turn on items to prove they're operable.

Enterprising thieves sometimes take advantage of checkpoint activity to steal items that roll through the conveyor belt while their owners are distracted. If you have a traveling partner, it's a smart strategy for one of you to go though security first and keep an eye on your valuables from the other side. ●

Digicam Survival Kit

Cameras need tender loving care, especially while on the road. A few accessories will keep you shooting cleanly and clearly until journey's end.

Microfiber cloth. Your camera is going to be handled a lot, which means smudges on the lens. The cloth will provide a safe, non-scratch way of keeping your lens clean.

Can of compressed air. Dirt and grit find their way into the darnedest places.

Extra memory card. Your camera probably came with a starter card you never use because of its meager storage capacity. Take it with you! It may help you squeeze in those last extra shots of the day.

Spare batteries. Nothing's more frustrating than realizing your camera is fresh out of juice at a picture-perfect moment. ●

Other Travel-Friendly Cameras

In addition to the Canon PowerShot A520, there are other cameras to consider as potential traveling companions. We chose the following cameras the same way we did the Canon—by directly asking a few prominent manufacturers which current models they would recommend, taking into account the same criteria on price, size, and performance.

Here's what they came back with:

Kodak Z700 Camera & Printer Dock Series 3 ($399.95; www.kodak.com). If you like the idea of cranking out your own prints in the hotel each night, consider this bundle. The dock also charges the 4MP Z700 ($299.95 by itself), which has 5X optical zoom and shoots to SD or MMC plus 16MB of built-in memory.

Nikon Coolpix 7900 ($449.95; www.nikonusa.com). Do you like making prints the size of your TV screen? You'll need to capture lots of image detail to do that, and the 7.1MP Coolpix 7900 can soak it in. It has 3X optical zoom and shoots to SD cards plus 13.5MB of built-in memory.

Olympus Stylus 500 ($399.99; www.olympusamerica.com). The 5MP Stylus 500 boasts some recent Olympus innovations, including a 2.5-inch display designed to remain clearly visible, even in direct sunlight. The entire Stylus line is constructed with all-weather metal casings and interior rubber gaskets, so if your destination is enduring a rainy season, don't worry about water damage. The camera features 3X optical zoom and shoots to xD-Picture Cards.

Sony Cyber-shot DSC W7 ($449.95; www.sonystyle.com). With 7.2MP resolution, the W7 is another camera to consider if you're inclined toward poster-sized prints. Also generous is the 2.5-inch display—a size more commonly found on camcorders. The W7 has 3X optical zoom and 32MB of built-in memory, so even if your Memory Stick fills up, you'll always have a reserve. ●

If Your Camera Is Lost Or Stolen

If your camera is missing and you suspect theft, you should report it to the local authorities. It will help if you can furnish a serial number to identify it, so travel with a record of your gadgets' serials.

Be sure to get a copy of the police report to give to your insurance agency, in case your camera isn't recovered. Before leaving on your trip, check with your insurer to see if your homeowner's policy covers off-premises theft and if you need to list specific items on that policy. Often, items worth more than $500 must be listed to be eligible for a claim.

Of course, theft prevention is the best policy. When you're not using your camera, keep it out of sight in a bag, backpack, or pocket (another bonus for small cameras). If your camera is large enough to need a neck strap, get a thick, tough one. Some thieves are skilled enough with a blade they can slice through a flimsy neck strap in a split-second.

However, according to research by Trackitback, most people parted from their gadgets are victims only of their own carelessness, and you can make your lost item easier to return. Trackitback ($8.95 and up; www.trackitback.com) and BoomerangIt ($9.95 and up; www.boomerangit.com) are services that provide tamper-resistant labels with unique codes that you can affix to cameras and other items. You then register your gadgets online with the service, which acts as a go-between in case someone reports finding a lost item. ●

Outlets & Power Sources

Unfortunately, there is no single international standard for electrical voltage, plugs, and outlets. If you're traveling with gadgets that need juice to work or recharge, you'll need to be prepared.

American electronics and appliances are designed to operate on electricity delivered at 110 to 120 volts (the force of delivery) and 60Hz (Hertz; the number of cycles per second for alternating current). Wall current in the United Kingdom and Europe is 220 to 240 volts and 50Hz. Further complicating matters are the various plug and socket configurations that can differ from country to country.

Good news, though: A lot of consumer electronics devices—battery chargers, notebook computer power adapters, and even appliances such as hairdryers—can accommodate higher currents without getting fried. Such devices are called dual voltage and either have a switch so you can toggle from one current standard to the other or will adapt to it automatically. Check the fine print on your gadget (or consult its manual) and look for the input rating. If you see AC 100–240V/50–60Hz, or something similar, you'll know you have a dual-voltage device, and life abroad will be easier.

Depending on your gadgets, you'll need to travel with one or more of the following:

Plug adapters. These allow a two- or three-prong American plug to fit a foreign wall socket. They do nothing to handle differences in current, but if you have a dual-voltage device, a plug adapter is all you need.

However, if you're traveling in several countries, you may encounter various types of sockets. The typical UK configuration (two flat pins and one rectangular) is different from what you'll find used widely, although not exclusively, on the European mainland (two round pins, often called the Europlug). And Italy has a socket unlike anywhere else in Europe. Unless you know exactly what to expect, it's best to pack an assortment of adapters, which should be available at an electrical supply store.

Voltage converter. This will downgrade current for a non-dual-voltage device, but you should use a converter only with relatively uncomplicated devices, such as hairdryers, curling irons, etc., that you'll use no more than an hour or two at a time. A converter packaged with a handful of plug adapters should run you in the neighborhood of $30.

Transformer. These cost more than converters—say, from $50 to $150, depending on how much wattage (amount of power) you need. They're also bulky; they're roughly the size of toasters and heavier. But a transformer is your only safe option with non-dual-voltage devices that use computer chips, electronic circuitry, or otherwise need to run continuously. ●

Archiving On The Go

It's been a busy few days of shooting and that 1GB memory card doesn't seem so bottomless anymore. What to do?

You could stock up on high-capacity cards, but that can be a wasteful expense; you may never again need several cards at once. Or you could email pictures to yourself from Internet-connected cafés, but RAW (uncompressed) files and high-quality JPEGs (Joint Photographic Expert Group) will choke your account's mailbox in a hurry.

It's more economical to free your card by transferring the day's pictures to a hard drive. If you're bringing along a notebook computer, all you'll need is the USB cable that came with your camera. That's fine for the hotel each night, but notebook PCs can be cumbersome to lug around during the day. Fortunately, there are some smaller alternatives.

Apple 30 GB iPod Photo and iPod Camera Connector ($349, $29; www.apple.com). The planet's favorite MP3 player can multitask as a photo viewer.

Belkin Digital Camera Link ($79.99; www.belkin.com). Unit plugs into the dock connector of third- or fourth-generation iPods.

Epson P-2000 Multimedia Storage Viewer ($499.99; www.epson.com). High-resolution photo viewer with 3.8-inch display and 40GB hard drive. Accepts CF (CompactFlash) and SD cards, others with optional adapters.

SmartDisk FlashTrax ($299.99 and up; www.smartdisk.com). Photo viewer with 3.5-inch display and 20, 40, or 80GB hard drive. Accepts CF cards, others with optional adapters. ●

Quest For Batteries

Digital cameras consume a lot more power than their film counterparts. Much of it goes to the back-panel display. At home, rechargeable batteries are always the best choice. You can shoot hundreds of pictures on a single charge. Using standard alkaline batteries, you could burn through an entire multipack in an afternoon and have only a few dozen shots to show for it; even fewer if you're using the flash.

But what about on vacation? You may opt to leave the charger behind and, because AA batteries are available nearly everywhere, pick them up as needed. Even cameras that have a lithium-ion pack sometimes include a compartment adapter that lets you use alkaline batteries.

There are pros and cons to this approach. Using disposables will let you travel lighter and may be sufficient if you tend to choose your shots carefully.

On the other hand, you may take many more pictures than you expect and find that replenishing the battery supply is more hassle than hauling along your charger. As well, it's more common in Europe than here to discover that new batteries are dead in their wrappers.

Unless you have a compelling reason to leave it behind, budget luggage space for your battery charger, especially if it's dual voltage. If it's not dual voltage, don't forget a converter or transformer . . . or consider just packing a few extra precharged batteries, instead. ●

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Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

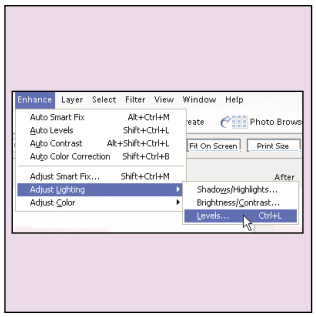
When you have a picture that is washed out or looks too dark, it is tempting to delete it as a lost cause. But don't give up without a fight! Although photo editors have basic brightness and contrast controls, the closest thing to a magic bullet for this kind of problem picture is an adjustable histogram.

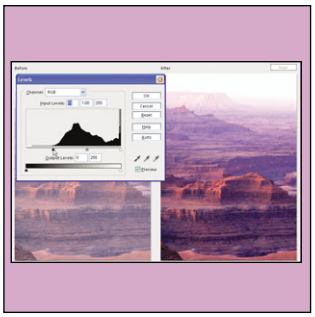
A **histogram** charts the distribution of a photo's pixels according to definable criteria. For our purposes, it tracks their **luminance** (also called luminosity); that is, their brightness. The histogram graphs luminance values between 0 and 255, from pure black to pure white. The greater the number of pixels at any value on that scale, the higher the spike in the graph. And by manipulating this graph, you can often work wonders on photos that need more depth and vibrancy.

In our example, we'll use a landscape shot in which haze and a low sun combined for a washed-out vista.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

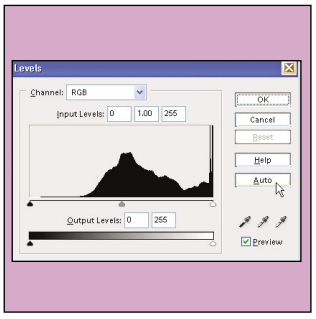
1 Open the Enhance menu and then the Adjust Lighting submenu and select Levels. Either view, Quick Fix or Standard Edit, is fine, but we'll use Quick Fix (which we had to select before opening the menus) so we can show the before-and-after comparison of the central portion of the photo.

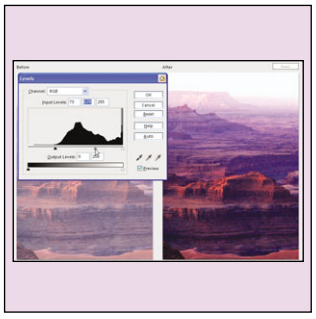




2 Another option is to manually adjust the settings. Drag the triangles at the left and right ends of the histogram inward until they're below the points at which the graph starts to curve upward. Here, only the left one needs to be adjusted, and the results are almost identical to the Auto option.

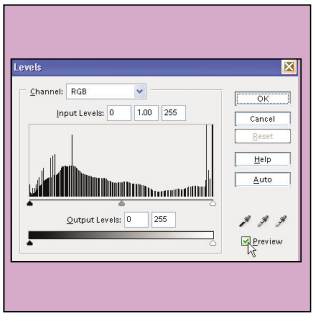
3 The histogram is bunched heavily in the middle, a sure sign of a dull, low-contrast photo. First, click the Auto button, which may be all you need to try.





4 For further adjustments, drag the center triangle. Dragging toward the right further deepens and darkens the photo and to the left lightens it.

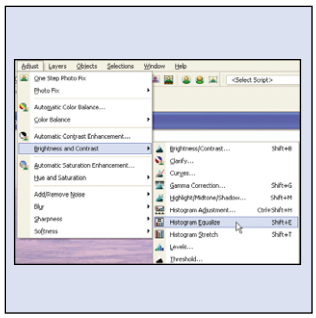
5 It makes a noticeable difference with improved contrast and color depth.



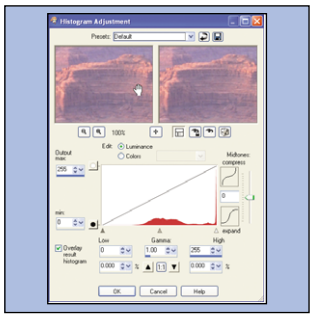
6 If you're not using the side-by-side view, toggle the Preview checkbox to compare before-and-after views. When you've achieved the look you want, click OK. Open the histogram again, and you'll see that it looks quite different.

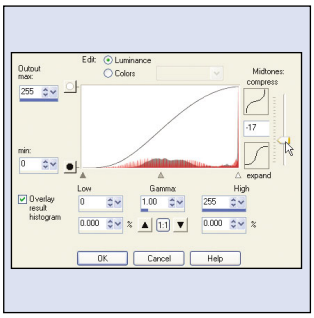
Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

Open the Adjust menu and then the Brightness And Contrast submenu. Select Histogram Equalize (redistributes pixels more evenly across the spectrum) or Histogram Stretch (pulls the histogram toward the ends where it falls short). Stretch improved our image realistically.



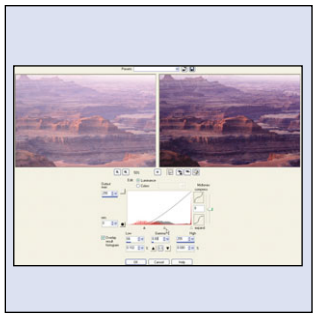
For manual control, choose Histogram Adjustment. Make sure the Presets menu is set to Default and the Edit option is on Luminance. Drag the before/after panes to a feature you want to use to judge the effects. For a fuller view, click the Zoom Out button.

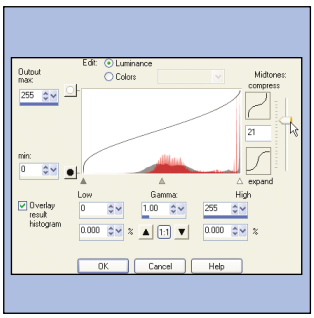




Depending on your photo, it may work better to tweak the Midtones slider instead. If the histogram bulges in the center with few or no end zone values, dragging the slider downward (Expand Midtones) will spread the pixel values outward to deepen contrast.

Drag the left and right triangles under the histogram to the point (or points) at which the graph begins to rise. Drag the center triangle to further adjust the contrast: Toward the left darkens the photo, and to the right lightens it.



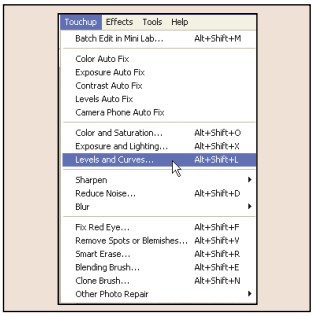


Conversely, if your histogram is a deep valley with peaks at both ends, drag the slider upward (Compress Midtones) to reduce the excess contrast. When you are happy with the photo's appearance, click OK.

Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

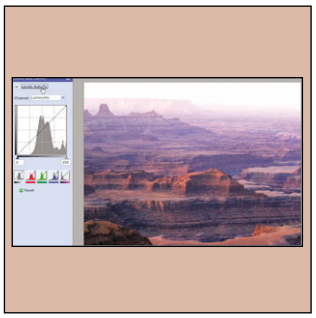
1

From the Touchup menu, choose Levels And Curves.



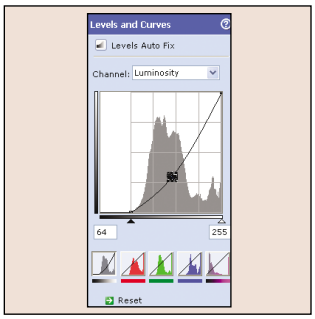
2

For one-click repair, click the Levels Auto Fix option on the left side of the screen. (You'll also find this option in the Touchup menu if you choose not to use the Levels And Curves submenu from step 1.) In this case it does about as good a job as we could do manually.



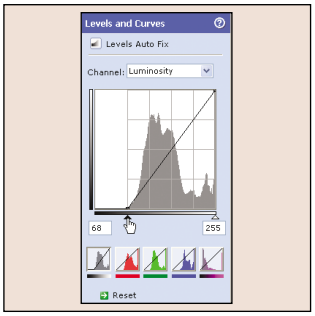
4

Unlike our other two editors, DIP has no center triangle for fine-tuning. Instead, you must drag the diagonal line into a curve. This is tricky to master; you may need to click Reset a few times before you get the results you want. In general, to darken a photo, drag the line down toward the right.



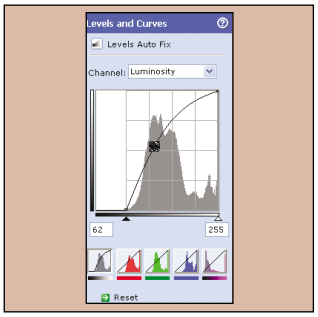
3

For manual control, drag the left and right triangles to the point (or points) where the histogram starts to lift.



5

To lighten a photo, drag the line up toward the left.



Cross over to the other side.
Xd.
The DEQX Calibrated™ DSP corrected powered speaker system is everything you've never heard before.
NHT
www.nhthifi.com
©2004 Rockford Corp.

Best Digital Cameras For Women

We Want Form & Function

Choosing the right digital camera can feel a lot like choosing the right car—part beauty pageant, part serious quest for the right set of features to fit your budget. Fortunately, when you set out to buy the perfect camera, you don't have to deal with pushy sales managers or get approved for financing. You do, however, have to wade through a market that's become flooded with a variety of cameras offering a dizzying array of features and styles. So, what's a girl to do?

First, you'll want to decide two important things: How much you can spend, and what you'll use your camera for. Once you have a general idea of your budget, and a sense of whether you'll be taking snapshots or looking to adjust your own aperture settings, ask yourself a few lifestyle questions. Do you want to be able to hand your camera to someone on vacation without also handing her the manual? Can your kids, co-workers, or technologically impaired spouse take photos with it? Will your camera feel like a brick or a cell phone in your purse? What if you want to shoot your daughter in action at her soccer game? Are you frequently holding a baby, an umbrella, or other things, which make it important that you be able to navigate menus and shoot photos using only one hand? Are you likely to drop your camera in the pool or shoot lots of photos in the rain? (See the "Underwater Action" sidebar.)

If, like most women, you primarily want to take snapshots, and you want to spend $200 or less, you'll sacrifice some quality and some features and you may have to make some concessions when it comes to size. Your $150 camera is more likely to remind you of a minivan than a Maserati, but it will still be useful. If you're willing to spend a little more, Canon, Kodak, Kyocera, and Sony all make excellent cameras that hover in the $250 to $300 range. Among our favorites are the 5MP (megapixel) Canon PowerShot A95 ($299; consumer.usa.canon.com) and the 4MP Kodak EasyShare CX7430 ($279.95; www.kodak.com). (For more on budget cameras, see the "Best Buys" sidebar.)

When it comes to making decisions about resolution, we recommend 3MP or higher. If you want to enlarge your photos—for example, make prints that are 8 inches x 10 inches or larger or blow

Fab Four Female-Friendly Features

SIZE MATTERS

Unless you're looking for professional-level control, the perfect camera should be as easy to slip into a purse or pocket as your cell phone. Just like buying shoes that are too small means you'll never wear them, buying a camera that's a little cheaper and a lot more bulky means you'll wind up leaving it home gathering dust when you could be out capturing keepsake moments.

MAKE IT SNAPPY

Who has time to sift through three menus to find the red-eye-reduction or self-timer? The Kodak EasyShare line won the ease-of-use category hands down. First timers or those who don't want to waste any precious time getting to know their camera will do well with these picks.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

While looks aren't everything, you should indulge your sense of style. Sleek looks, slim designs, and enticing colors all enhance the joy of going digital. Liz Lange and Nikon even offer a co-branded camera (Coolpix 3200; $399.95; www.coolpix101.com/main.html?section=real_lifeography&topic=capture_glow) designed by Liz herself. (All proceeds benefit a national children's charity.)

BIG SCREEN

Squinting isn't a good look in photos, and it isn't a good look for the one behind the camera either. Some stylishly small cameras entice you with their pixie-sized good looks, but the trade-off is a screen the size of a postage stamp. Buyer beware, especially if you're far-sighted.

up details—look for digicams with 4MP resolution or higher. The higher the resolution, the better the quality of your images. (For more on selecting the perfect camera, see the "Fab Four Female-Friendly Features" sidebar.)

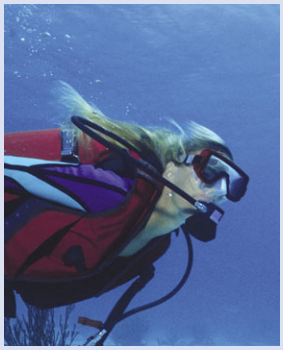
If having a slim, highly portable camera is your main objective, we recommend an ultracompact device. Our favorites are the Casio Exilim EX S100 ($299; www.casio.exilim.com) and the Canon PowerShot SD20 ($349). The 3.2MP EX S100 is about the size of a credit card and the thickness of a pack of gum, but still offers a 2-inch LCD. The SD20 is slightly smaller than a pack of cigarettes, comes in flashy colors, such as "garnet," "Zen gray," and "midnight blue," but offers only a 1.5-inch LCD. If you find you rarely have two free hands, you can operate both of these cameras one-handed (although that'll be more of a challenge for lefties).

Also leading the pack in the ultracompact category are the Panasonic Lumix FX7 ($399; www.panasonic.com/consumer_electronics) and the Canon PowerShot SD300 ($349). The 5MP Lumix FX7 prevents blurry photos by detecting jitter and automatically moving the lens to correct it and it features a 2.5-inch display, the largest LCD in this class. The 4MP PowerShot SD300 features a 2-inch LCD and an impressive 3X optical zoom.

The Miss Congeniality award goes to the 4MP Kodak EasyShare LS743 ($299). This is the camera anyone can use—children, spouses, co-workers, strangers who take your photo on vacation. It's an excellent starter camera for someone nervous about going digital, and unlike some of the other EasyShare models, it's also relatively pretty and petite.

If shooting high-quality action images is what you're after, the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-P200 ($399; www.sonystyle.com) is a home run. It has it all: looks, features, and convenient size. It comes in two colors (red and silver), serves up 7.2MP resolution, and 3X optical zoom, and you can capture high-resolution shots at up to at 1.1fps (frames per second), perfect for preserving every motion of that winning goal. It also shoots high-grade MPEG (Moving Picture Experts Group) movies with audio and provides a 2-inch LCD. But like so many superstars, it's also a little high-maintenance. This camera takes some getting used to, and it's tough for beginners to fully take advantage of all its perks.

For a more user-friendly, but high-end, digicam experience, Nikon offers the Coolpix 7900 ($399; www.nikonusa.com), which was specifically designed with women in mind. New to the market, the Coolpix 7900 caters to the woman who is willing to spend a little more in order capture beautiful photographs with a sharp-looking, ultra-portable digital camera. While it isn't the prettiest camera in the bunch—we'd give that honor to the PowerShot SD20—at



Underwater Action

The submersible Pentax Optio WP ($400; www.pentaximaging.com) features a rust-resistant metal exterior, rubber sealants, and lens protection that lets you shoot in the rain, in the snow—or even in up to five feet of water. With 5MP, a 3X optical zoom lens and a 2-inch low-reflection monitor, you don't have to sacrifice quality for durability, which makes it perfect for the adventurous, aquatic, or just plain clumsy shutterbug and her family.

Top Five Cameras For Women

These are not your mother's cameras. They can shoot video, record audio, go underwater, and "de-light" (which we found delightful). We tested 13 cameras from market leaders Canon, Sony, and Kodak, as well as strong contenders Casio, Nikon, Panasonic, and Konica Minolta. It was tough to choose, but these are our five pic picks for women.

Nikon Coolpix 7900

$399; www.nikon.com
High-tech, high-resolution, ultra-portable, and handsome to boot. This 7.1MP camera will please point-and-shooters and more finicky photographers, too.

Casio Exilim EX S100

$299; www.casio.com
So slim it could almost fit in your wallet, and it won't break the bank to buy one. The 2-inch LCD is the jewel in this pretty camera's crown.

Canon PowerShot A95

$299; www.canon.com
An affordable, easy-to-use 5MP camera. Its only downside is its super-size.

Kodak EasyShare LS743

$299; www.kodak.com
For nervous beginners, or those with no time to waste learning the ropes, this 5MP beauty is the best camera you can buy for under $300.

Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX7

$399; www.panasonic.com
Easy on the eyes in more ways than one, this gorgeous ultracompact boasts the largest LCD in its class (2.5 inch), 5MP resolution, and a rapid-fire shutter speed. 7.1MP, it's a cut above many of its competitors. Lightweight and full-featured, the Coolpix provides cutting-edge technology, such as its built-in "D-Lighting" software, a one-button fix for overly dark photos, and software-based automatic red-eye removal. Its 2-inch LCD is the perfect size, and while it offers an exceptional level of control, you won't have to wade three menus deep—or take a photography class—to access the best ones.

Last, but not least, for the serious photographer who wants to change lenses, zoom up to 12X, and enjoys the feel of a traditionally sized 35mm camera in her hands, we recommend three options: Panasonic's Lumix DMC-FZ5 ($499.95), Konica Minolta's DiMage Z5 ($649.99; konicaminolta.us), and DiMage Z20 ($399).

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

BEST BUYS

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but how much are you willing to pay for the camera that takes it? If finding a high-quality camera for less than $300 is your goal, we recommend these five cameras: Canon PowerShot A95 ($299), Casio Exilim EX S100 ($299.99), Kodak EasyShare LS743 ($299), Kodak EasyShare CX7530 ($299), and Kodak EasyShare CX7430 ($279.95). Of these five, the Casio Exilim is the sleekest and slimmest; the Canon PowerShot A95 is the chunkiest, but the most fully featured; and the PowerShot A95 and Kodak EasyShare CX7530 are the only cameras we tested that offer 5MP with a price tag of $300 or less.

tips Edit Your Vacation Videos

1 Tell A Story

Edit and arrange your footage as if you're writing a story. Provide a setting for your audience and select frames that outline the events of the day or week to help usher your viewers through the action. Start with a clip of your kids zipping up their suitcases or your spouse jamming the last bag into the trunk. Grab a shot of your kids slathering on sunscreen for the big day at the beach. Conclude your flick with clips that give the viewer a sense of closure, such as a shot of a mound of shopping bags, a clip of your kids nodding off on the ride home, or a final glimpse of the sun dipping into the horizon.

2 Get Close

Include plenty of close-ups. Focus on smiles and other expressions, as well as signs, souvenirs, or other documentation of your vacation destination. Get a clip of your kids' excited faces as you round the last corner to the amusement park or a close shot of your husband licking his fingers after enjoying a funnel cake. Interspersing close-ups, such as a zoomed-in shot of a pair of concert tickets or the "Welcome To Florida" sign, quickly tells your audience where you are and what you are doing.

3 Choose Clear Shots

When compiling your video, only use frames that are easy to see, as viewers will lose interest quickly if they have to work at watching the video. Although one of your favorite vacation moments may have been the night by the campfire, leave it out if you can't clearly see faces or action. Also, keep panning shots to a minimum. If you must use panning shots, find clips that keep the subject in the trailing third of the frame; the audience will feel like they know where the subject is heading. Try to avoid shots that involve zooming in and out and include only clips before or after you zoom, if possible. Watching a camera zoom can make your audience feel dizzy and disoriented, and this motion may ultimately detract from the action you tried to capture.

4 Get Personal

Vacations are as much about the people on your vacation as they are about the destination. Make sure the majority of your shots include people, not just monuments or scenery. Interview your traveling companions briefly the day before the big trip and include their comments throughout your video as you explore your vacation spot. Ask your child to play newscaster and stand next to a landmark or point of interest and explain it. Personal moments like these will help keep the attention of your viewers.

5 Keep It Brief

We all know the real trouble with home videos is the exhausting length. Although you may think every scenic mile climbing the Rocky Mountains was awe-inspiring, your audience will tire of the repetition. For this type of setting, keep up the pace of your production by using video snapshots of one scene and then another, documenting the action in short spurts. Limit your footage to clips of the funniest and most impressive moments.

BY SARIE WHITSON

All-In-One Smartphones

Multimedia Goes Mobile

They're stylish. They sing in public. They play video. They take photographs. And they surf the Internet and use instant messaging around the clock. No, they are not our teenage daughters; they are the latest generation of all-in-one smartphones.

Of all the consumer electronics technology changes in the past five years, we rank changes in cell phones right up there among the most significant developments. Just a couple of years ago, we were talking about smartphones as a class of cellular devices that let users connect to the Internet via a wireless data connection. While that was pretty cool at the time, today's smartphones let you do much more.

Smartphones blend traditional cell phone use with multimedia features. The newest batch of smartphones contains video displays, digital camera capabilities, MP3 players, Microsoft Windows Media Player, radios, games, and more. We'll take a brief look at some of the technologies behind these features, and then we'll show you some of the devices that show off these features.

The Smarts Behind Smartphones

Short for Third Generation, 3G technology lets phones transfer data at up to 2Mbps (megabits per second) when

the phone is stationary. This technology makes it possible for cell phone users to stream video and music to their phones, as well as perform other high-speed data transfers, but 3G is just beginning to emerge in the United States.

A new data transfer technology that already is making waves is EDGE (Enhanced Data for Global Evolution), a faster version of the widespread GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication) mobile phone service. EDGE allows data transfer at rates of up to 384Kbps (kilobits per second), and EDGE-enabled phones let you quickly download email messages and other Internet content to your smartphone.

Audio is another important multimedia application, and more smartphone manufacturers are incorporating MP3 support into their devices. True, MP3 is old hat, so the technology itself isn't news. However, the fact that it is being integrated into cell phones is. Microsoft is providing new technology to help customers access their music through their phones with its Windows Media Player 10. More than 70 smartphones and portable media devices can now run the media player. If your smartphone uses this platform, you can rip your CDs to your PC's Windows Media Player 10 and then transfer them to your smartphone.

And then there's Bluetooth. This technology is widely known for its interaction with PDAs, but it has found its way onto numerous multimedia smartphones, as well. Bluetooth is a technology specification that enables short-range communication between wireless devices, such as between a PDA and a notebook computer, and it enables smartphones to offer handy accessories such as wireless headsets.

OK, enough of the educational background. Let's move on to the really fun stuff: the smartphones themselves. Here are five of our favorites, presented to you in alphabetical order.

Audiovox SMT5600

PC users are likely to feel immediately at home when they pick up the Audiovox SMT5600 (as low as $199.99 [price set by vendors]; www.audiovox.com), thanks to the familiar Microsoft Windows interface. The combination smartphone, digital camera, and audio player runs Microsoft Windows Mobile 2003 Second Edition software, which enables the

TV On Your Cell Phone

You use your smartphone to check email, surf the Web, take digital photos, and more. Now TV is also finding its way to a captive audience through cell phones. Orange (www.orange.co.uk) in the UK recently announced that the 3G Nokia 6680 will feature nine television channels including ITN News, CNN, Cartoon Network, extreme sports, and dedicated "Big Brother" and "Celebrity Love Island" channels. In India, Orange (www.orange.co.in), part of the Hutchison network, already offers more than 15 channels on Orange TV, including news, cartoons, and other popular shows.

Carriers & Their Smartphones

It's a disappointing fact of life that not all smartphones work with all carriers. Before you pick out the phone of your dreams, take a look at a selection of smartphones each service provider offers. The names of the phones are listed as you would see them in the carriers' online stores. And, keep in mind that not all models are offered in all coverage areas.

- **Cingular Wireless:** Audiovox SMT 5600 Smartphone, Nokia 6620, palmOne Treo 650, Sony Ericsson S710, BlackBerry 7100g
- **Sprint:** Smart Device Treo 650 by palmOne, Smart Device PPC-6600, Smart Device SP-i600 by Samsung
- **T-Mobile:** T-Mobile BlackBerry 7100t, T-Mobile Sidekick II
- **Verizon Wireless:** BlackBerry 7250, palmOne Treo 650 Smartphone, Samsung i600 Smartphone
- **U.S. Cellular:** Motorola V710, Kyocera 7135 Smartphone

smartphone to communicate with your Windows PC. This allows you to perform tasks such as download and play audio and video files on Windows Media Player 10; access your Outlook email, calendar, content, and tasks; and surf the Web via Internet Explorer.

The SMT5600 offers digital photography and camcorder functionality, as well. The camera has 4X digital zoom with a sharp, clear display, Bluetooth support, and a built-in speakerphone and Mini SD (Secure Digital) memory card slot that lets you expand the smartphone's storage capabilities.

All of these features are wrapped in a 3.6-ounce black package with silver accents that measures 4.24 x 1.82 x 0.69 inches (HxWxD).

Nokia 6620

The Nokia 6620 ($349.99; www.nokiausa.com) is one of the three most popular phones in Nokia's stable of nearly 70 models, and considering its combination of technology and features, it is easy to see why. This smartphone is Bluetooth- and EDGE-enabled, and it provides useful features for both business and pleasure.

On the business front, you can sync the device with your PC. This provides access to your work and personal email accounts, as well as your calendar and contacts, which you can store in your phone book with multiple numbers and text entries.

On the lighter side, the built-in camera has a 640 x 480 resolution and features such as a night mode, self-timer, and 2X digital zoom. If you prefer "moving pictures," you can view real-time streaming clips via the RealOne mobile player or capture clips with the video recorder. And after you have downloaded pictures and clips to your phone, you can easily organize them in the phone's gallery.

The Nokia 6620 weighs 4.37 ounces and is 4.28 x 2.29 x 0.93 inches.

In April, Nokia announced the Nseries, a new series of smartphones that will launch later this year. The Nseries smartphones include 3G technology and are based on the Series 60 smartphone platform. These phones will carry typical smartphone features, along with features such as a camera equipped with Zeiss optics and a 4GB hard drive that can store up to 3,000 tunes.

palmOne Treo 650

For an all-in-one device, it is hard to beat the functionality of the Treo 650 ($449;

Connect & Organize On The Go

Cell phones that feature PDAs are must-haves for busy career women. If you want one device that carries both your planner and your cell phone, be sure to take a look at the following smartphones:

- The Blackberry 7100 line (www.blackberry.com). This Bluetooth-enabled device offers a miniature but standard keyboard, PC synchronization, a Web browser, and more.
- The Treo 650. Send email, store business contacts, synchronize your calendar, get driving directions from the Web, and perform other business and social tasks.
- The Sidekick II. T-Mobile's proprietary combination PDA/cell phone features a QWERTY keyboard, built-in camera, unlimited Internet features such as email and Web browsing, and other enhancements.

When Smartphones Get Sick

Should you worry about the health of your all-in-one cell phone? In April, Symantec (www.symantec.com) published a survey of 300 Americans in which 73% of them knew about viruses targeting the devices, and more than 70% of the users were concerned crackers could steal their information. That claim was quickly disputed by WDSGlobal (www.wdsglobal.com), which handles data support calls for major cell phone manufacturers and service providers. WDSGlobal said just 0.0036% of the 275,000 calls from the previous quarter came from callers inquiring about viruses. But no matter what the numbers are, it's wise to be aware that there are potential dangers and check with your service provider if you have any questions about its security practices or risks regarding your smartphone.

www.palmone.com). This device is a cell phone, MP3 player, digital camera, digital camcorder, Web browser, email client, and PDA rolled into one package.

The Treo 650 lets you search the Web through the proprietary, intuitive Blazer browser, which includes familiar Web browser tools such as Forward and Back arrows, a home page icon, and a bookmarks icon. It supports more than a dozen Internet standards and offers useful features such as a customized start page and easy-to-use navigation with the five-way navigator button. It includes an email client that works with any Web-based email account such as Yahoo! Mail. And, you can sync your smartphone with your PC and transfer your contacts, calendar, tasks, memos, and more.

On top of all that, the smartphone carries an MP3 player with RealPlayer software that lets you download and listen to tunes from your PC by storing them on an expansion card (sold separately). Photographers can take advantage of the digital camera's 2X digital zoom and can display photos with a resolution as high as 640 x 480. You can also shoot and transmit video clips. In addition, the phone is Bluetooth-enabled, so you can talk on a wireless headset or connect with other Bluetooth devices.

The Treo 650 smartphone weighs 6.3 ounces and measures 4.4 x 2.3 x 0.9 inches.

Sony Ericsson S710a

When you first pick up the S710a ($399.99; www.sonyericsson.com), you may think you have picked up a digital camera by mistake. While the phone looks like a cell phone on one side, the other side is reminiscent of an older point-and-shoot digital camera, albeit with an updated-for-the-21st-century look. The 1.3MP (megapixel) camera snaps photos with up to a 1,280 x 960 resolution, and it features digital zoom, automatic exposure control, and a 262K color screen with 240- x 320-pixel resolution that makes it easy to view your snapshots.

If you turn the device over and open the cool swivel cover, you'll see the S710a's cell phone and other capabilities. Download and play Java 3D games (we happen to be partial to Super 3D Golf) quickly with EDGE technology. You can send instant messages to friends through the My Friends messaging feature or click the PlayNow button to listen to pop hits. The professional in you can sync data from your PC, including your list of contacts and

your calendar, via Bluetooth, infrared, or cable connections.

The S710a weighs 4.83 ounces measures 4.2 x 1.9 x 1 inches.

T-Mobile Sidekick II

If you spend as much time talking with your fingers as you do with your voice, you'll want to check out the T-Mobile Sidekick II ($299.99; www.tmobile.com). Because the device opens to reveal a standard, though small, QWERTY keyboard, the Sidekick II is well-suited for email and instant messaging. It includes a 6MB email account, and you can set up three external accounts, excluding corporate email, to send email to your Sidekick, as well. AOL Instant Messenger is built-in, or you can download Yahoo! Messenger if instant messaging is more your style.

Where there is email, there is usually Web access, and the Sidekick II has a Web browser that gives you the ability to create bookmarks, view your history, and create a customized home page. Plus, you can sync with your PC and check your calendar, search through an address book, write notes, or access your tasks list.

The earlier version of the Sidekick had an optional camera module, but this time around, T-Mobile has added an integrated camera with a built-in flash and 640- x 480-pixel display.

The phone features have been redesigned, too. The Sidekick II includes a speakerphone, a dedicated 12-key dial pad for making phone calls, and fun music clips for phone ringtones.

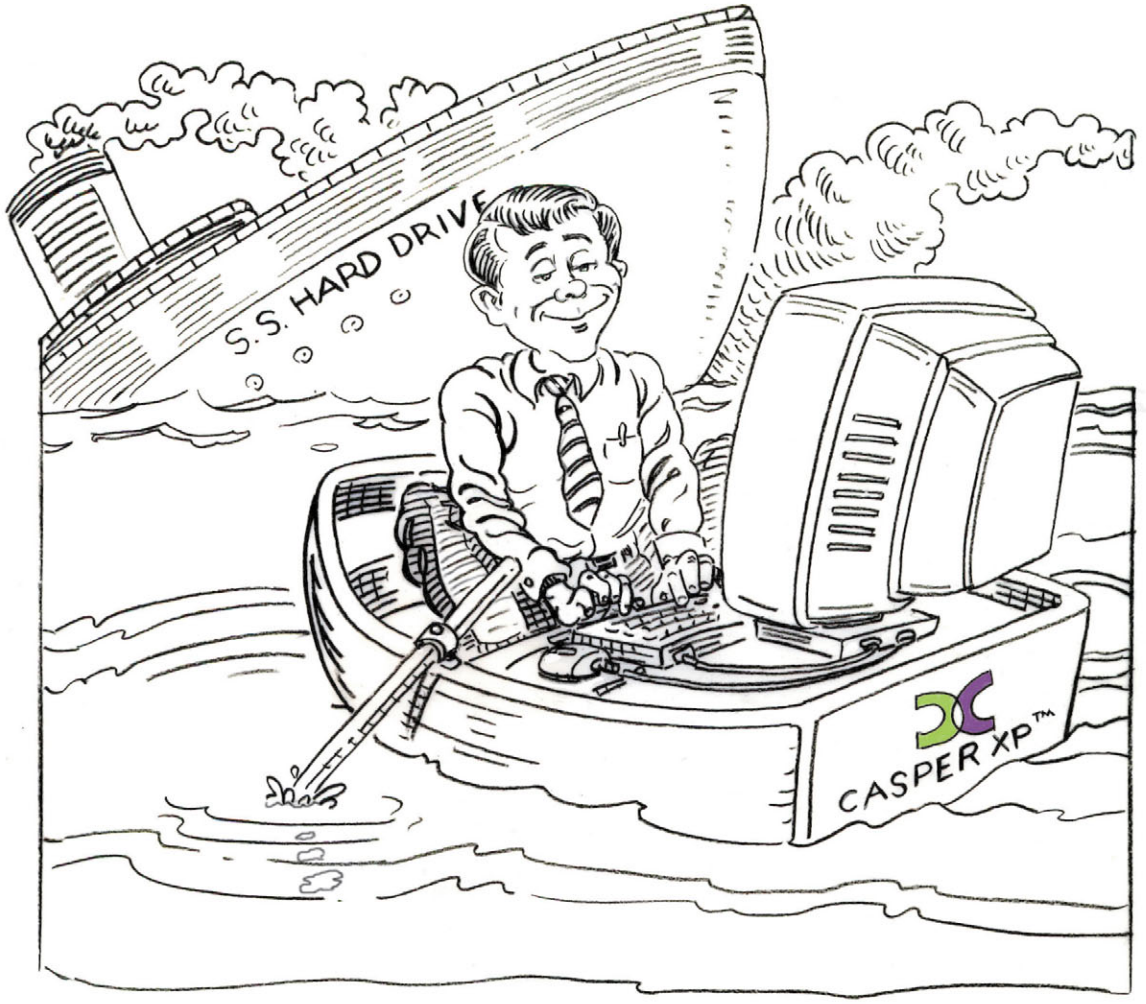
The Sidekick II is the heftiest of the devices covered here, weighing in at 7 ounces. It is 5.1 x 2.6 x 0.9 inches.

Find The Right Smartphone

Upgrading your current cell phone to a multimedia smartphone requires that you balance several factors, including functionality, features, and form. Fortunately, with all the options out there today, you are likely to find several models that meet your budget (and your carrier's requirements).

BY HEIDI V. ANDERSON

"With Casper XP on board, you won't need a life jacket"



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Back-To-School NOTEBOOKS

Laptops Are A Girl's Best Friend

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

As young women head back to school this fall, many are tucking laptops into their backpacks. When buying notebooks, they're concerned with price (as most students are), warranties, and weight. Stacey Trzcinski, a student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, says, "The warranty was key, considering I break things a lot. The other big feature was its weight. As I bring my laptop with me to school, I needed something lightweight that I could cart around with me and not have it break my back."

We found loads of lightweight laptops from reputable companies and a couple of newcomers with features and specifications that caught our eyes. Here are three standouts.

X2 StyleBook

$1,199 • www.x2usa.com

Designed for the girl on the go, the StyleBook lets you watch movies, view photos, and listen to music without loading Windows. The roomy hard drives start at 40GB and work up to 100GB. With only half of your 40GB drive set aside for music, you could save approximately 10,000 songs and still have room for class notes and homework. We're also impressed with the StyleBook's color palette. Having colors other than iron gray, flat black, or bubble-gum pink from which to choose is a welcome change.

Tulip E-Go

$ N/A • www.tulip-ego.com

The Tulip E-Go debuts in October, missing the back-to-school rush but making it a perfect gift for the holidays and the start of the second semester. Among many highlights, the E-Go functions as a PDA: Busy students who want to dash off an email between classes can send and receive email without having to boot (load the operating system) the entire laptop, and if your sweetie's at school across the country, you can at least see his face using the integrated Web cam. The E-Go comes with a number of interchangeable covers, so you can customize the look of your laptop based on your mood that day.

Dell Inspiron 600m

$1,149 (our configuration) • www.dell.com

A couple of young women we spoke to told us they like Dell notebooks. Maureen Smith, a first-year law student at Catholic University, says she's going to buy a Dell because her school partners with the company to provide student discounts. She's also impressed with Dell's "strong reputation and warranty services."

Sarah Schumacher, in her third year of law school at DePaul, bought a Dell Inspiron because of Dell's reputation, customer service, and price. "First, I knew that I needed something pretty affordable because I was entering graduate school and had limited finances." Her only regret is not giving weight more consideration. "A few pounds doesn't sound like much when lifting weights," Schumacher says, "but when it comes to carrying a computer on public transportation and then to school, it can be extremely heavy." That said, however, Schumacher uses her notebook for everything. "I type all notes, in class and out, and combine that information for studying outlines at the end of the semester," she says. "Also, my law school is completely wireless, so I use the Internet throughout the day to look up cases and do research. Because of the large volume of information that I have to combine for school, I do not think that I could survive without my computer."

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At first look you are awestruck by the beauty of Sanus Component Furniture. And when you investigate deeper you see the strength of aluminum pillars blended with the character of solid hardwoods and unique features like tempered glass shelves and a wire management system. Component Furniture includes cabinets, armoires and digital TV stands that configure to your exact needs. Add the Sanus Convection Cooling System that allows air to flow around heat-generating A/V gear like a cooling canyon breeze and you have Component Furniture that echoes of quality and performance.

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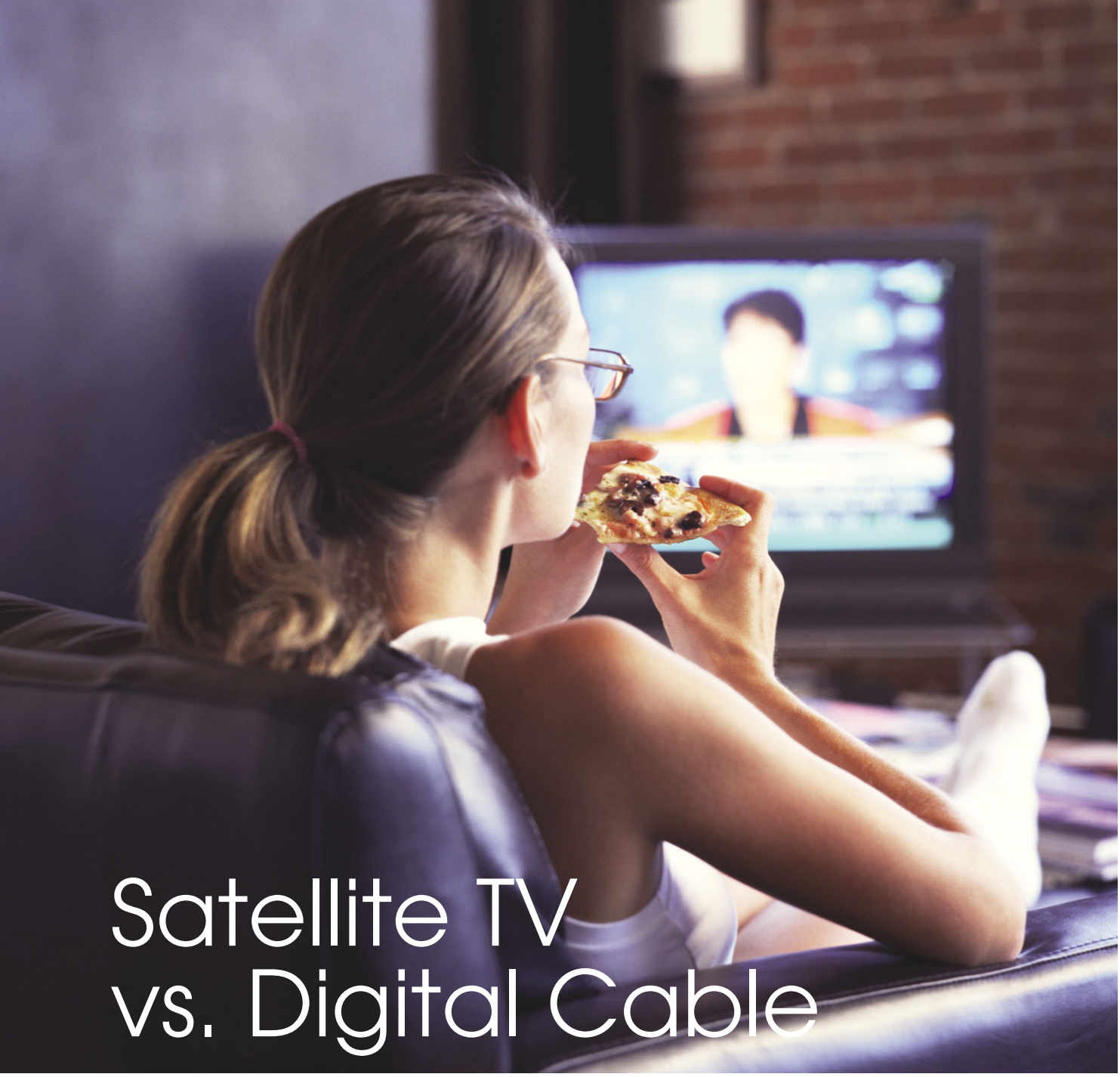


Satellite TV vs. Digital Cable

The Rivalry Continues To Grow

These days, relaxing can be a lot of work. Casual channel surfers risk being engulfed in a 250-channel television flood. Two technologies, digital cable TV and satellite TV, offer consumers a wide array of choices when it comes to home entertainment. Both offer a sharper picture and better sound than traditional cable, as well as dozens more channels of TV, movies, and music. But choosing between them can be difficult, especially because the two systems each have their drawbacks. Fierce competition for customers has resulted in a marketplace full of confusing and sometimes misleading rumors, as well as pricing policies that can make predicting your cable bill as complicated as doing your taxes. We'll explain what's behind digital cable and satellite TV and mention benefits and drawbacks of both, so you can decide which system is best for you.

Cable & Satellite Basics

If you already have analog cable TV, digital cable might not sound like a huge change. In some ways, it's not. Digital cable signals come over the same wire that the analog signals do, so if you already have analog cable, you won't need to change any wiring in your house. However, for most TVs, digital cable requires a special set-top box for each television to decode the digital signals. Usually, your cable service

includes set-top box rental for one TV, but outfitting additional TVs will cost extra. For example, Comcast (www.comcast.com) charges, on average, $5 monthly for each extra system. However, if you are pinching pennies, you don't have to get a box for each TV in your house. You can get digital service in the living room and still get your analog basic cable channels on other televisions. Then the company charges you for digital cable service on only that one TV.

Digital cable's main competition comes from satellite television services that broadcast similar digital programming. Just a few years ago, getting satellite meant putting a huge metal dish, sometimes up to eight feet in diameter, in your backyard. However, you no longer need to make your house look like a NASA research center to watch TV. The new generation of satellite dishes are much smaller, about 20 inches across, and you can mount them on a windowsill or the edge of a roof. With satellite service, you need to run a wire from the dish to each of your televisions, and like digital cable, satellite systems require you to rent a set-top digital tuner for each television on which you want to watch different channels.

The two major satellite providers, DISH Network (www.dishnetwork.com) and DirecTV (www.directv.com), charge $4.99 for each additional box, but unlike cable, you'll need one for each television, even if you only want it to have basic service. One exception to the set-top box rule comes from DISH Network, who, in an effort to reduce the number of devices you need to rent, now offers dual-tuner units—two independent tuners in the same box. After placing a dual-tuner box on one TV, you can run a cable to the second and control the programming with a special remote that works through your home's walls.

Cable & Satellite Pros & Cons

Though cable and satellite TV providers offer some similar services, some distinct benefits and drawbacks may give one the edge when you decide which kind of service works best for you. One of the biggest differences is, as Char Beales, president and CEO of CTAM, says, "Satellite is a good product for many consumers, but it's only a video product. Cable's two-way connection allows it to provide interactivity, as well as phone and Internet service."

Cable Pros

- Wiring may already be installed in your neighborhood.
- Billing is usually month-to-month.
- On Demand programming available
- Pay-per-view available
- HD programming usually available
- DVR service available
- High-speed Internet and telephone service often available through cable

Cable Cons

- If wiring isn't installed, installation isn't free.
- Installation may require digging in your yard.
- All services may not be available in your area.

Satellite Pros

- Installation usually free
- Available in rural and remote areas
- Pay-per-view available
- HD programming available
- DVR service available
- May get discounts on high-speed Internet service

Satellite Cons

- Requires a mounted dish
- Often requires a year-long commitment to get free equipment
- On Demand programming not available
- Can't integrate cable, telephone, and Internet on one bill

Watch Your Favorite Shows On Demand

The digital service that cable and satellite can deliver provides a slightly sharper picture than analog and usually gets you dozens of new channels, including dedicated music channels. But digital cable provides additional benefits over satellite, based on the

fact that cable is actually a two-way connection, so you can use your set-top box to transmit programming requests back to the cable company. Char Beales, president and CEO of CTAM (Cable & Telecommunications Association for Marketing; www.ctam.com), emphasizes that, "The fact that cable is a two-way connection allows it to provide interactive services that satellite just can't."

One of these features is On Demand, in which you select the TV program or movie you want to watch from an on-screen menu using your remote and have it immediately broadcast directly to your TV, often for no additional fee, depending on the type of program you choose. Some movies cost similar to what you pay to rent a movie. The system is interactive and lets you pause, rewind, or fast-forward what you are watching as the cable company broadcasts the show to your TV. It usually also gives you access to programs on premium channels, such as HBO or Cinemax, to which you subscribe. Comcast claims to have over 3,000 programs available on demand, with 95% of those for no additional charge, but other cable operators such as Cox (www.cox.com) and Time Warner Cable (www.timewarnercable.com) offer a selection that consists mostly of pay-per-view movies and sports.

DISH Network's DVR-510 can record satellite programs and lets you pause live TV.

Satellite hasn't been able to match the convenience of On Demand programming, although it has come close. Both cable and satellite systems let you order pay-per-view movies, but if you choose a satellite movie, you have to wait until the scheduled start time and won't be able to pause or rewind during it. Consequently, satellite providers have begun to bundle DVRs, such as TiVo, with their systems. A DVR lets you pause and rewind live TV by recording video to the device's hard drive and it can even automatically record shows it thinks you might enjoy. Of course, now cable companies provide DVR service, too. Cox's price is fairly typical at $9.95 per month to lease the DVR equipment and $4.95 per month for the DVR service. See more information on DVRs in our feature package articles, starting on page 34.

HDTV: Sharpen Your TV's Picture

Digital TV isn't the same as HDTV; while both use digital signals to create a sharper picture than analog, HD's picture is even more detailed and lifelike. However, you need a special HD-capable television to view it, as well as a special set-top box that will cost extra. If you have satellite service, you probably won't use it to receive local HD broadcasts. A roof-mounted off-air antenna receives local programming directly from the broadcast stations. Providers also offer HD-DVRs to record high-definition shows, but because HD programming is so detailed, these programs take up more room on the hard drive, leaving you less space to record other shows.

Extra Services: Internet & Telephone

Cable companies are now taking advantage of their wiring networks by offering high-speed Internet service and home telephone service over the same cable through which you get your cable television. You can usually save money by ordering these services as a package, and your discounts increase for each service you buy. For example, if you have Comcast cable, you can add Internet service for around $43 or phone service for around $45, but if you already subscribe to cable and Internet, phone service will cost less, at about $40. The satellite services have tried to match this deal by offering rebates and tie-ins with DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) high-speed Internet services available through your phone jack, but you usually can't combine them on one bill, and they may not be available where you live.

Channel Your Options

When it comes to choosing between satellite and digital cable, you will find a lot of information to sort through, so you should check out all the options available in your area before you decide what is best for you. Let's take a look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of service.

Location. First, you should determine what options you have. You may have only one cable company that can service your home, so it will be your only choice for digital cable, if it even offers digital cable in the first place. Call or visit Web sites of your area's cable companies to determine exactly what

Will A Dish Dish Out Headaches?

Lots of rumors are constantly floating around about satellite dishes. Here are a few common questions and answers.

Q I live in a rural area; can I get satellite television?

A Even if your area is not served by cable, as long as you live in the continental United States and have a clear view to a satellite, you can. If you live in Alaska or Hawaii, you can probably get satellite service, but you may need a larger dish. Call a provider for exact details.

Q Will my satellite reception go out during bad weather?

A If your dish is unobstructed and aimed correctly, you'll probably experience few service interruptions, even during thunderstorms. However, it is possible to experience interference during inclement weather.

Q Does the dish spin around?

A No. The dish is fixed, pointing in one direction. As the earth rotates, the satellites rotate with it, so they remain at the same point in the sky. Once the installation technician goes home, you won't have to move it.

Q Can I install the dish myself? Do I have to?

A Both major satellite providers offer free installation. Usually you can install the dish yourself if you're looking for a project, but it's not necessary.

Q Can I get my local news and sports channels?

A Access to sports and local programming over satellite depends on where you live. These broadcasts may not be offered, and even if they are, you may need a second dish capable of looking at your provider's other satellites to receive them. Satellite providers can tell you what's available in your area. You can always use a regular broadcast antenna to get local channels the old-fashioned way.

Q My homeowner's association doesn't allow dishes. Can I get satellite TV?

A In 1996 the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) issued what is commonly called the Satellite Consumer's Bill of Rights, a regulation that preempts homeowner's associations' rules and states that homeowners have the right to use certain types of dishes on their property. In practice, though, the law is still murky, and nobody likes to talk to her neighbor's lawyer. Consider painting your dish (but don't use glossy or lead-based paint and don't paint the Low Noise Block converter) or putting it where it is not visible from the street. You can even put your satellite dish inside a window, but it will lose signal strength and may have reception problems.

services they offer. Service often varies by city, sometimes even among neighborhoods, and digital cable still isn't available everywhere. If you want digital programming, especially in a rural area, it is possible that satellite will be your only option.

Programming offers. All digital systems offer at least dozens and dozens of channels, but strangely, your favorite channel might not be included. What good are all those extra channels if they are of professional wrestling and not A&E?

With satellite service, also pay special attention to what local programming is available, in case your provider doesn't offer local news channels or sports networks that you prefer to watch. In some areas you may have to install a second dish to pick up the additional channels from your provider's other satellites; in other areas your only option might be to install an off-air antenna to pick up broadcast signals. If you use an off-air antenna, you won't enjoy the clear digital picture from the satellite service; rather, you'll relive your memories of life before cable, assembling an antenna to receive that fuzzy picture.

Setup in your home. With either cable or satellite service, you'll likely need to make a few changes to your house to accommodate the cable connection or satellite dish. If you need cable installed, the company may have to dig in your yard to run a wire to the house and then snake it through your walls or under baseboards to your TVs.

If you're considering satellite, think of where you could put the dish. Satellite providers' Web sites, such as DirecTV's, provide information to help you predict what direction and angle you'll need to point the dish, based on your ZIP code. The dish needs a direct view of the satellite, unblocked by trees or buildings, and

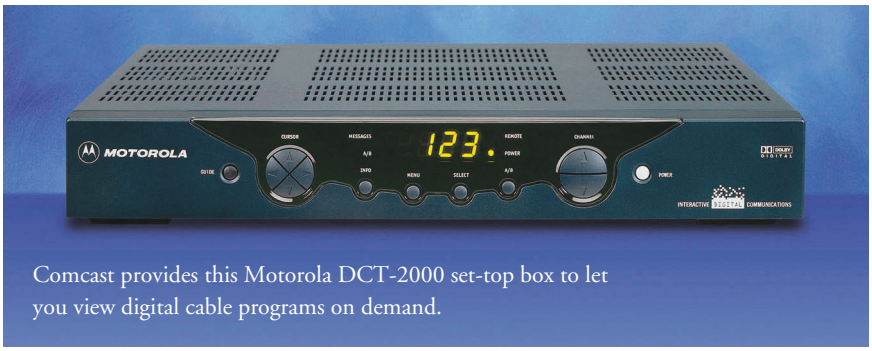
Predict Prices

Cable and satellite plans involve so many services now that predicting your bill might require a fleet of accountants. Among costs you need to look out for are charges for installation, activation, setup, delivery, equipment rental, program service, premium service, DVR service, and HD service. When comparing plans, remember that installation is a one-time charge, but monthly service fees keep on coming. Spending $100 on installation might be disappointing, but saving an extra $5 a month over two years for service will more than make up for it. These costs change often and vary by city, especially when subject to special deals.

should be within 100 feet of your TV if you don't want to install a signal booster.

You might also need to make a few adjustments in your home based on how many TVs you want service for and how much space you have to store equipment. With cable you could easily have one digital system with a DVR, one digital system without, and one analog system. Think about your viewing habits and plan accordingly. If your TVs are hidden away in cabinets or alcoves, make sure you have room to put a set-top box in there, and if you have a stylish, wall-mounted TV, ensure you have a nearby location for the set-top box, as well.

The final bill. Cable and satellite companies are locked in a fierce battle for subscribers, but the perks they offer often take different forms. Many satellite companies provide and install basic equipment for free, as long as you're willing to make a year-long service commitment. Cable companies, however, usually charge a fee for installation, but they are more likely to provide free premium channels for the first few months of use or discounts if you subscribe to their other services, such as Internet or digital phone service. Find a deal that looks attractive and then have a customer service representative walk you through all of the costs for the equipment, installation, and monthly service before you commit. Use these prices when considering which service costs more because they'll give you a much more accurate picture of what you'll spend than the advertised rates.



Comcast provides this Motorola DCT-2000 set-top box to let you view digital cable programs on demand.

Turn On & Tune In

Once you've made a choice and ordered service and installation, all that's left to do is sit back and watch. After you've committed to a service, don't second guess yourself. Both satellite and digital cable are good services that greatly expand your entertainment choices; there's no wrong decision. But if you get frustrated trying to choose between them, remember that you'll be able to do your couch-potato routine soon enough.

BY JOSEPH S. BELL

tips Cell Phone Repair

1 Antenna Answers

So, your 1-year-old nephew chewed off part of your cell phone antenna. Sometimes your phone can still function without an antenna, but replacing it is often relatively simple and inexpensive. Some cell phones have antennas that you can easily screw into place without opening the cell phone body. You can purchase a replacement antenna from your service provider's retail store or Web site, or you can ask your dealer to order it. If you can't easily replace the antenna yourself, your dealer most likely can.

2 Scratches & Broken Pieces

It's happened a million times leaving the grocery store: an armful of groceries + a purse over the shoulder + a hand on your child = a cell phone on the ground. You can probably recall numerous incidents where you dropped your cell phone, leaving it with noticeable scratches or broken pieces. Taking precautions can help you avoid these annoyances. Purchasing a protective cover for your cell phone can help prevent it from getting banged up if you drop it. Placing your phone inside your purse or in a safe place while you aren't using it will also help keep it in one piece.

3 Worn-Out Keypads

Worn-out buttons are common with cell phones, but they are an easy fix. Often you can buy a replacement keypad from your wireless phone dealer or through the manufacturer's Web site. Many cell phones have a plastic face that pops off easily, and you can slide your new keypad in, matching it up with the button cutouts on the cell phone's face. Snap the plastic face cover back on, and you can again read the numbers on your phone. If you are intimidated by taking things apart, you can opt to have your service provider replace the piece for you with the purchase of the part from a dealer's retail store.

4 Bad Charge

If you try to charge your phone and nothing happens, perhaps the prongs that the charger plugs into are broken or bent, leaving you with a dead phone, or you may have a defective charger. Regardless, first confirm the problem by plugging your charger into a different outlet to see if the problem is electrical. If the problem persists, visit or call your cell phone dealer to see if you are eligible to receive a new charger or cell phone under your warranty (if you have one).

5 Beyond Repair

Crunch! That was the sound of your cell phone smashing underneath the tires after you accidentally left it on the roof of your car. If you have a cell phone with damage too extensive to buy replacement parts, you will be thankful your cell phone salesperson convinced you to buy insurance. Most cell phone companies offer an insurance plan for a small fee that is tacked onto your monthly bill (on average, $4 to $6 per month). If you have insurance and need a replacement, simply call in your claim, pay your deductible, and receive a new phone.

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PENTAX *ist DL Digital SLR 84

AROUND THE HOME

Garmin StreetPilot c330 86
ARCHOS PMA 400 88
ARCHOS AV 700 90
NETGEAR RangeMax Wireless Router 92
Hannspree TVs 94
Wacom Graphire Bluetooth 96

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Casio EXILIM CARD EX-S500
MSRP: $399.99
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Antiblur Technology & State Of The Art MPEG-4 Movie Features In Newest EXILIM Camera

Casio's newest addition to the EXILIM CARD digital camera series, the EX-S500, is barely bigger than a credit card and just .54 inches at its thinnest point. Packed into the pocket-sized body are 5MP (megapixel) and MPEG-4 movie recording capabilities, allowing more than one hour of standard video recording when using a 1GB SD (Secure Digital) memory card. Casio's EXILIM Engine's Anti Shake Digital Signal Processor also makes blurry pictures a thing of the past. As with all digital cameras in the EXILIM series, the EXILIM CARD features Casio's EXILIM Engine, an image-processing module that creates high-quality images, operates quickly, and consumes very little power. The latest version of the EXILIM Engine features the Anti Shake DSP, which reduces blurring caused by shaking hands or moving subjects, while the Auto Macro and Quick Shutter functions ensure that photos are properly focused.

The EX-S500, which is available in white, orange, and gray, incorporates Casio's EXILIM Engine along with advanced MPEG-4 quality movie capabilities and antiblur technology. Additionally, the 5MP resolution and 3X zoom capability enable high-quality pictures. A large 2.2-inch TFT (thin film transistor) LCD screen makes still and video photography easy to shoot, and the Li-Ion rechargeable battery allows up to 200 shots on one charge.

The pocket-sized EX-S500 is quick and easy to use for both business and pleasure. Comparable in size and weight with most cell phones, the EX-S500 is conveniently portable, taking high-quality pictures and movies anywhere, anytime.

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Other EXILIM CARD EX-S500 Features:

- Super battery life allows up to 200 pictures per charge, based on CIPA standards
- Shoot video continuously for 1 hour and 20 minutes
- One hour of video available in Normal mode using a 1GB SD memory card
- Once it's on, the camera is ready to take pictures in approximately one second
- High-speed picture playback in approximately 0.1 seconds
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- Beautiful design is brilliant and smooth, due to a special electrical coating process, enhancing the look and feel of the stainless steel body

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Our StreetPilot c-series GPS navigators feature a simple touch-screen interface with automatic route calculation to any destination and turn-by-turn voice-prompted directions along the way. Selecting a destination is straightforward and requires only a limited amount of input from the user. Plus, the StreetPilot c320 and StreetPilot c330 allow you to choose between a 3D navigation view or the more traditional "bird's eye" overhead view.

For the ultimate out-of-the-box convenience, the StreetPilot c330 comes preloaded with highly detailed MapSource City Select street data. The database features an industry-leading 5 million points of interest—including hotels, restaurants, gas stations, ATMs, and favorite attractions. (The c320 comes with a 128MB SD card and a MapSource City Select CD-ROM for data transfer from a PC via a USB connection.)

The centerpiece of both units is a bright, 3.5-inch diagonal, 16-bit color display that makes navigation a snap. The StreetPilot c330 features dual-integrated speakers for high-quality voice prompts, and an internal Li-Ion battery for out-of-car route planning.

The new StreetPilot c-series boasts distinctive and sleek styling—the only buttons are a rotary volume knob and an

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on/off switch. The device is secured by a suction-mount cradle that fastens to the windshield for easy portability between vehicles. Users can customize their unit's appearance with an array of colored faceplates (sold separately).

StreetPilot c330 Features:

- WAAS (Wide Area Augmentation System)-enabled 12 parallel channel GPS
- Built-in patch antenna; MCX-type connector for optional external GPS antenna connection
- Preprogrammed internal memory
- Audible and visual navigation instructions and warnings
- Weight: 9.45 ounces
- Built-in Li-Ion battery for trip planning
- Integrated suction cup mounting system provides easy adjustment and quick release
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ARCHOS PMA 400
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Stay Entertained & Connected

The ARCHOS Pocket Media Assistant PMA 400 is a 30GB pocket-sized device that combines full video and audio capabilities with wireless connectivity on a Linux platform. The PMA 400 is the most versatile portable video recorder or player on the market today.

The PMA 400 combines essential entertainment features—video, music, photos, and gaming—with Internet access and productivity applications in one pocket-sized device. With the PMA 400 consumers can record video directly from a TV, VCR, or cable box; schedule recordings; record and play music; view

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photos; and play games. It also features wireless and Ethernet Internet connectivity, the ability to check email, manage contacts and calendars, and navigate quickly and easily with an LCD touch screen. It is a USB host device for attaching digital cameras, keyboards, hard drives, and other portable devices.

With a slim, sleek, lightweight form factor and revolutionary new features, the PMA400 is generations ahead of competing devices.

ARCHOS™ on the go

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ARCHOS AV 700
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ARCHOS Makes The DVR Mobile With The AV 700 For Entertainment On The Go

The AV 700 is certainly the first truly mobile DVR, offering direct recording to TV, a wide screen, and a huge 100GB hard drive to store up to 400 hours of video or 250 movies for viewing on the go.

TV programs and video recordings are the signature feature of the ARCHOS AV line, and the AV 700 makes it fast and easy for consumers to get content from a TV, DVD player, VCR, cable box, or satellite receiver without using a computer. In addition to direct TV recording, the AV 700 enables consumers to schedule recordings while they are away and view them on a bright 7-inch LCD wide screen. The combination of the video recording, scheduling, large hard drive capacity, wide screen, and other features—such as photo and music playback and gaming applications—make the AV 700 the perfect portable device for modern families, travelers, high tech enthusiasts, and anyone gearing up for their summer vacations.

The ARCHOS DVR AV 700 lets you digitally record TV programs and movies directly from your TV, VCR, DVD player, and cable box or satellite receiver using the new ARCHOS TV Docking Pod. The new Docking Pod plugs in to the AV 700 and connects directly to your video source for easy recording of video onto the device. The AV 700 encodes in and plays

Advertisement

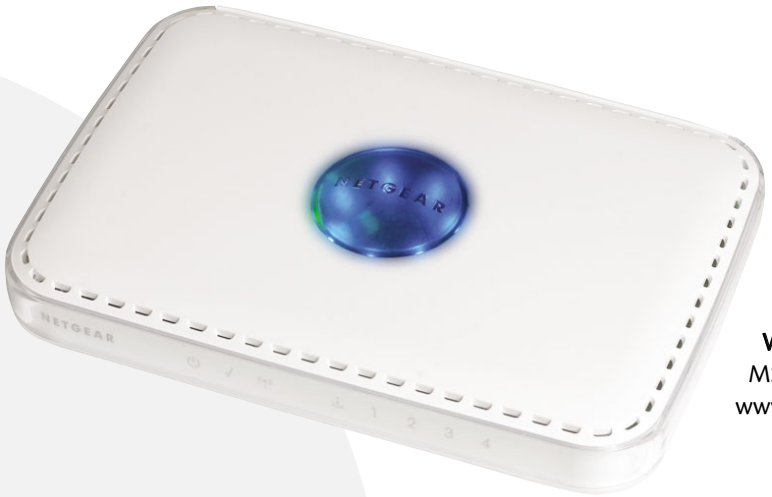
back MPEG-3 videos with stereo sound and plays DivX 3 in near DVD quality on TV.

With the AV 700 you can also make scheduled recordings for the week or month. Once programming and recordings are made, the integrated scheduler controls the tuner inside your VCR, cable box, or satellite receiver to automatically adjust the channel and record based on the time and duration of the schedule. When finished, just simply enjoy and watch your favorite shows wherever you are through the large, 7-inch color LCD or other external screen (with composite analog inputs).

The AV 700 comes standard with a TV Docking Pod, AV in and out cables, remote control, protective case, headphones, USB 2.0 cable, USB host cable adapter, and power adapter. Optional accessories include backseat car holder, protective case, double headphone kit, travel AV kit, car adapter, additional docking pod, additional batteries, and other add-on products.

ARCHOS™ on the go

Advertisement



NETGEAR RangeMax Wireless Router
MSRP: $139.99
www.netgear.com

1,000% More Wireless Coverage Than Standard 802.11g

As a 21st-century consumer, computers are an integral part of your life. But does your home computing environment work for you? Even if you already have a wireless network, you've probably found dead spots in your home where your Internet connection fades in and out or drops off completely.

Now say good-bye to those dead spots and say hello to the freedom to work (and play) absolutely anywhere in your home!

With the RangeMax Wireless Router, your whole house becomes a hot spot. NETGEAR's exclusive RangeMax technology gives you the longest range of any wireless device on the market today—up to 10 times the wireless coverage of 802.11g. So you'll have a sizzling-fast, consistent connection in every room of your house . . . and beyond.

Range Matters. Put the NETGEAR RangeMax Wireless Router to work for you, and that's all you need—leave those range extenders, repeaters, and external antennas at the store. RangeMax adjusts to the interference and physical barriers in your home and delivers up to 500,000 square feet of coverage—1,000% more than 802.11g. And you don't need to throw away your old wireless devices; RangeMax is 100% compatible with your existing 802.11b/g products and will boost their range and speed by up to 50%.

Power Under The Hood. RangeMax is an advanced Smart MIMO (Multi-In, Multi-Out) technology that uses seven internal antennas. RangeMax constantly surveys your home environment for physical barriers and interference and adjusts the wireless signal to compensate for these performance blockers. For example, if you carry your laptop from the family room to the bedroom, RangeMax automatically senses the change and selects from over 100 possible antenna configurations to deliver you the fastest, clearest

Advertisement

connection. Everyone will enjoy consistently high-speed connections everywhere in your house—no drop-outs and no dead spots.

Simple, Safe, Secure. Think you can't set up your wireless router without an engineering degree? Think again. NETGEAR's SmartWizard makes the setup easy and hassle-free. SmartWizard automatically detects your ISP's network settings and walks you through each step of the installation process. It's like having your own computer technician right by your side.

NETGEAR also ensures that every computer user in your home network can work and play safely—with a double firewall, WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy), and WPA-PSK (Wi-Fi Protected Access, Pre-Shared Key) Security, your network will have powerful safeguards against unauthorized usage.

Other RangeMax Features:

- Up to 1,000% more wireless coverage and speed than 802.11g
- RangeMax Smart MIMO (Multi-In, Multi-Out) Technology
- Seven internal smart antennas adapt on the fly to interference
- SmartWizard installation assistant
- 100% compatible with 802.11b, 802.11g, and SuperG devices
- Ultra-Secure (double firewall, WEP, WPA-PSK) protect against unauthorized usage

NETGEAR®
Everybody's connecting.®

Advertisement

Hannspree TVs
MSRP: Forthcoming
(Available July)
www.hannspree.com

Unique Designs For Individual Tastes

Hannspree is introducing a new class of A/V products and accessories that reflect individual tastes, interests, and lifestyles.

Discarding traditional design rules, Hannspree has created a product line that offers:

- Designs that swoop and curve
- High craftsmanship with brushed aluminum, leather, wood, and fabric
- A variety of color options in red, green, blue, and yellow
- Televisions that challenge convention and spur the imagination

Hannspree's creative designs are divided into three main product lines: Sports, which features concepts based on sporty themes and fan merchandise; Style, which includes fashion and home-life concepts; and Fantasy, which offers playful and collectible designs for the entire family. Exclusive licensing agreements with the Walt Disney, Warner Bros., the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and Major League Baseball have allowed Hannspree to create designs featuring professional teams, cartoon characters, and cultural icons.

Advertisement

From fun-spirited soccer-ball-shaped design to sleek, stylish, and sophisticated models, Hannspree has something to offer everyone.

Sizes available at U.S. launch include 10-, 12-, 15-, and 23-inch monitors (16:9). Larger sizes will be available in Q4.

Models will also be available at certain luxury retailers in the near future.

History

- Hannspree launched its brand in Taiwan in 2004 and is expanding internationally. Its Beverly Hills store will be opening July 1; its San Francisco store is opening in late summer or early fall; and its New York City 5th Avenue store is opening around Thanksgiving.
- Company headquarters are located in Taipei, Taiwan.
- Hannspree employs more than 800 people at the company's headquarters, two manufacturing facilities, a global logistics center, and U.S. marketing headquarters in San Francisco.

HANNspree

Advertisement

Wacom Graphire Bluetooth
MSRP: $249.99
www.wacom.com

First Wacom Wireless Pen Tablet For Photo Enthusiasts

For photo enthusiasts who seek the control and comfort of a cordless, battery-free pen tablet and the freedom of a wireless device, Wacom Technology has introduced the Graphire Bluetooth. Mobile office workers, educators, and aspiring digital artists will also appreciate the new device and the ability to work where and when they want.

Cordless & Wireless: A Winning Combination

Wacom's patented cordless, battery-free pen technology works harmoniously with Bluetooth wireless technology to create a leading-edge environment for digital imaging fun.

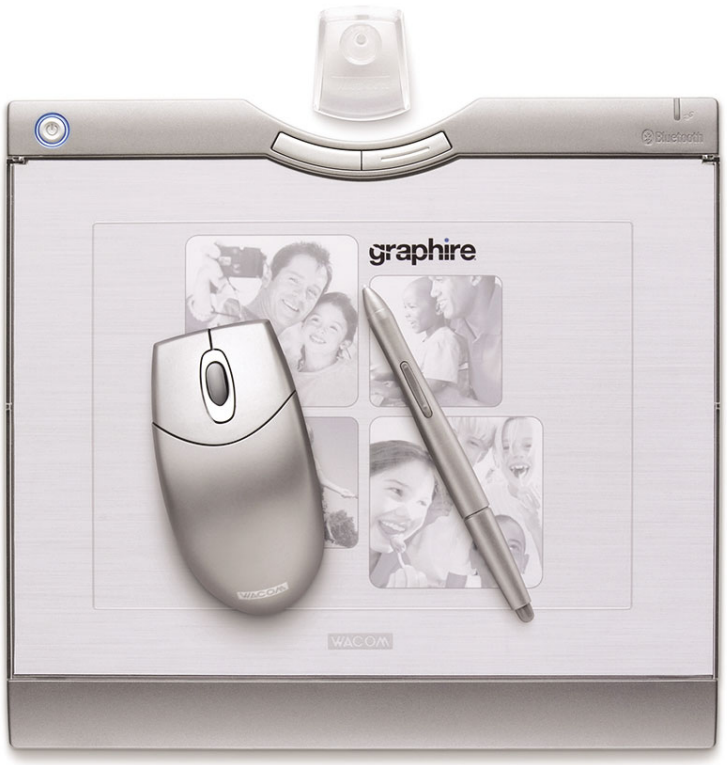
The Wacom pen looks and feels like a regular pen and operates without batteries or cords. Additionally, with 512 levels of pressure sensitivity, a Graphire pen provides a natural and controlled way to retouch and edit digital photos and create original art. A built-in eraser even makes it easy to quickly fix mistakes.

Bluetooth wireless technology is a global communications standard used by millions that allows computers and other devices to communicate reliably and effortlessly over distances of up to 30 feet. The fast and sophisticated method of transmission ensures protection from interference.

Remote Power

The Graphire Bluetooth tablet features a rechargeable lithium-polymer battery that provides up to 25 hours of wireless freedom between charges. A 12-foot cable on the

Advertisement



universal power adapter makes it convenient to use the tablet while the battery is charging. Estimated recharge time is five to six hours. The universal power adapter accepts 110 and 220 volts for use virtually anywhere in the world.

Other Graphire Bluetooth Features

Graphire Bluetooth incorporates two on-tablet programmable buttons, called ExpressKeys, which are designed to optimize workflow by providing quick access to commonly used modifiers, mouse clicks, and keystrokes. Graphire Bluetooth users will also appreciate the ability to use their Graphire pen to naturally annotate documents in such programs as Adobe Acrobat, Apple Inkwell, Microsoft Office PowerPoint, OneNote, and EverNote for Windows.

Graphire Bluetooth comes with industry-leading software including: Adobe Photoshop Elements 2, to quickly and easily edit digital photos and create original artwork; Corel's Painter Essentials 2, to create natural media art and organic effects; and Color Efex Pro 2 GE by nik multimedia, to selectively apply photographic enhancements.

WACOM®

Advertisement

Marantz DV7600
MSRP: $1,099
www.marantz.com

Ultimate Source Component For Movies & Music

The Marantz DV7600 universal DVD player is an ideal solution for enjoying ultimate high-quality home entertainment.

It includes many of the same features and benefits as the company's flagship DV9500, including an HDMI interface for a direct digital connection, video scaling circuitry capable of outputting video signals to 720p and 1080i, and 3:2 and 2:2 pull-down detection.

For optimum image quality, the DV7600 features 216MHz/12-bit video D/A converters, true 10-bit video processing, plus Marantz's proprietary HDAM (High Definition Amplifier Module) output stages.

Advertisement

Reflecting Marantz's heritage as a legendary audio company, the DV7600 also features some of the world's most advanced audio technologies.

The DV7600 also offers a Pure Direct mode for use as an audio-only playback component, ensuring audiophile sound quality without EMI interference from the advanced video circuitry.

Like all of Marantz's DVD players, the DV7500 plays every major format of optical discs.

marantz®

Advertisement

Roku PhotoBridge
MSRP: $299.99 and $399.99
www.rokulabs.com

View Your Favorite Photos In High Definition

PhotoBridge HD is a high-definition digital media player that turns a TV or HDTV into an art gallery. With front-loading card slots, PhotoBridge can accept the memory card from any digital camera and instantly display a photo slide show onto the TV. PhotoBridge even comes with an art memory card so works of art from Monet and Picasso can quietly play on the TV with classical music. PhotoBridge really rocks when it plays favorite family photos along with any digital music. It's a great cocktail party idea.

For the first time, enjoy viewing your favorite digital photos in high-definition on your HDTV using Roku's PhotoBridge HD High-Def Media Player. Simply snap in your digital camera's memory card or browse the files stored on your computer via your home network (Ethernet or Wi-Fi). You can also play digital video and digital music. It's easy to browse through files using a simple user interface and Roku's custom, ergonomic remote control.

For a sophisticated atmosphere, Roku offers the PhotoBridge HD Gallery Collection to create an inspiring gallery in your living room. Choose from a wide selection of motion and still art to turn your flat-screen or HDTV into a brilliant work of art.

Any way you use it, the PhotoBridge HD is simple and easy. Just connect to your home network for sharing digital media from your PC, or pop in a variety of memory cards and watch your HDTV come to life with photos, art, music, and video.

Digital Photos:

- Browse your favorite photos in stunning high definition
- Display images from a memory card or your computer's hard drive
- Use the easy controls on the custom remote control to browse images and set a slideshow to your favorite music

Advertisement

- Pause, skip, zoom, and rotate images at the click of a button; display exposure and file name info
- No more crowding around a PC monitor in your cluttered den—enjoy your favorite photos from the comfort of your sofa

Digital Video:

- PhotoBridge HD supports playback of MPEG-2 digital video files, including Transport Stream and DVD-style Program Stream files
- Play video saved on your computer, such as TV broadcasts recorded with a TV tuner card

Digital Music:

- Enjoy your growing music library away from your computer, on your living room's home entertainment system
- Supports MP3, AAC, WAV, and AIFF
- Browse your music folders quickly and easily—never change a CD again!

Roku products can also be found worldwide and in multiple languages at major consumer electronics retailers including Best Buy, Tweeter, RadioShack, Fry's Electronics, Magnolia Audio Video, Crutchfield, Future Shop, and CircuitCity.com.

Roku

Advertisement

Roku SoundBridge
MSRP: $199.99 to $349.99
www.rokulabs.com

Playing Your Favorite Music Files Is A Breeze

Digital music isn't just for headphones. It can be enjoyed in the bedroom, kitchen, living room, or even the patio. Roku SoundBridge is the sleekest network music player on the market. It sits on a shelf, mounts to the wall, or can fit neatly in the A/V stack. SoundBridge connects easily to any home computer and can stream digital music and Internet radio from a computer to any stereo or powered speakers wirelessly with no unsightly cords to untangle.

SoundBridge is the only network music player that:

- Plays digital music in every format (AAC, MP3, WMA, WAV and AIFF)
- Streams digital music from Napster, Rhapsody, Musicmatch, and other stores
- Has a bright display and remote control

The only differences between the M2000 ($349.99), M1000 ($249.99), and M500 ($199.99) models are the sizes and capabilities of the displays. The M2000 and M1000 have a bright, sharp, vacuum-fluorescent display, and the M500 uses a LCD display.

Other Roku SoundBridge Features:

- SoundBridge is the most compatible, attractive, and easy-to-use network music player on the market.
- Music Anywhere—Connects to your stereo or powered speakers to play your PC or Mac digital music files anywhere in the house via Ethernet or Wi-Fi network.

Advertisement

- Internet Radio—Listen to hundreds of free music and talk Internet radio stations. Save 10 of your favorite stations for easy recall, without even turning your computer on!
- iTunes—SoundBridge uses Apple's DAAP (digital audio access protocol) to communicate directly with iTunes, and it uses less network bandwidth by decoding AAC files in the player rather than in the PC.
- Most Compatible Player—Built-in support for Windows Media Connect and Windows Media Player 10; Apple Rendezvous and iTunes; Rhapsody; and any music services using Windows Media DRM 10, such as Napster, Musicmatch, and WalMart.com.
- All Popular Formats—Supports a wide range of music formats, including WMA, AAC, WAV, MP3, and AIFF.
- Large Display/Convenient Remote—Browse, select, and control your music from across the room using the large, bright SoundBridge display and custom remote control.

Roku products can also be found worldwide and in multiple languages at major consumer electronics retailers, including Best Buy, Tweeter, RadioShack, Fry's Electronics, Magnolia Audio Video, Crutchfield, Future Shop and CircuitCity.com.

Roku

Advertisement

The World's First Boombox For Your iPod

Take your music outside and get the party started!

The popular iBoom Boombox for iPod is the first boombox developed specifically for iPod and iPod mini. The iBoom is a 20 Watt, four-speaker, battery-powered party in a box that lets users connect their iPod and share their music anywhere. DLO's iBoom features a fully digital FM stereo with two station presets and a bright amber backlit display. It provides hours and hours of portable music powered by six D batteries. When plugged in the DLO iBoom is not only AC powered, but charges the iPod, as well.

Takes iPod's tunes with you to the beach, pool, friend's house, picnic—anywhere music makes a gathering better.

DLO DIGITAL LIFESTYLE OUTFITTERS

Storage Solutions that make folks stand up and take notice!

Kanguru Zipper HD

Kanguru Zipper Drives are ultra compact USB 2.0 hard drives capable of storing 4 - 40GB of data. Perfect for transporting all your data files that you need to carry with you! Just plug it into a USB port and you are ready to go!

Features:

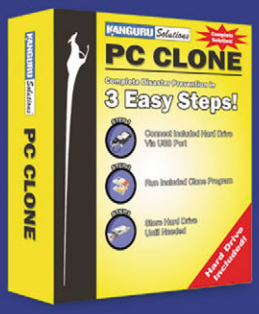
- Pocket sized design
- Fold Away USB Connection
- Less $$ than Flash Drives
- Highly Durable

Kanguru QuickSilver

Run out of room for your photos on your computer? Store them on this sleek, high quality external HD. The QuickSilver is a great way to add storage to your PC or Mac quickly and easily.

Features:

- Up to 400GB of storage
- High Performance 7200RPM Drives
- USB 2.0 or FireWire/USB 2.0
- Vibrant Blue Kanguru LED
- Includes NTI Backup Now!4 software

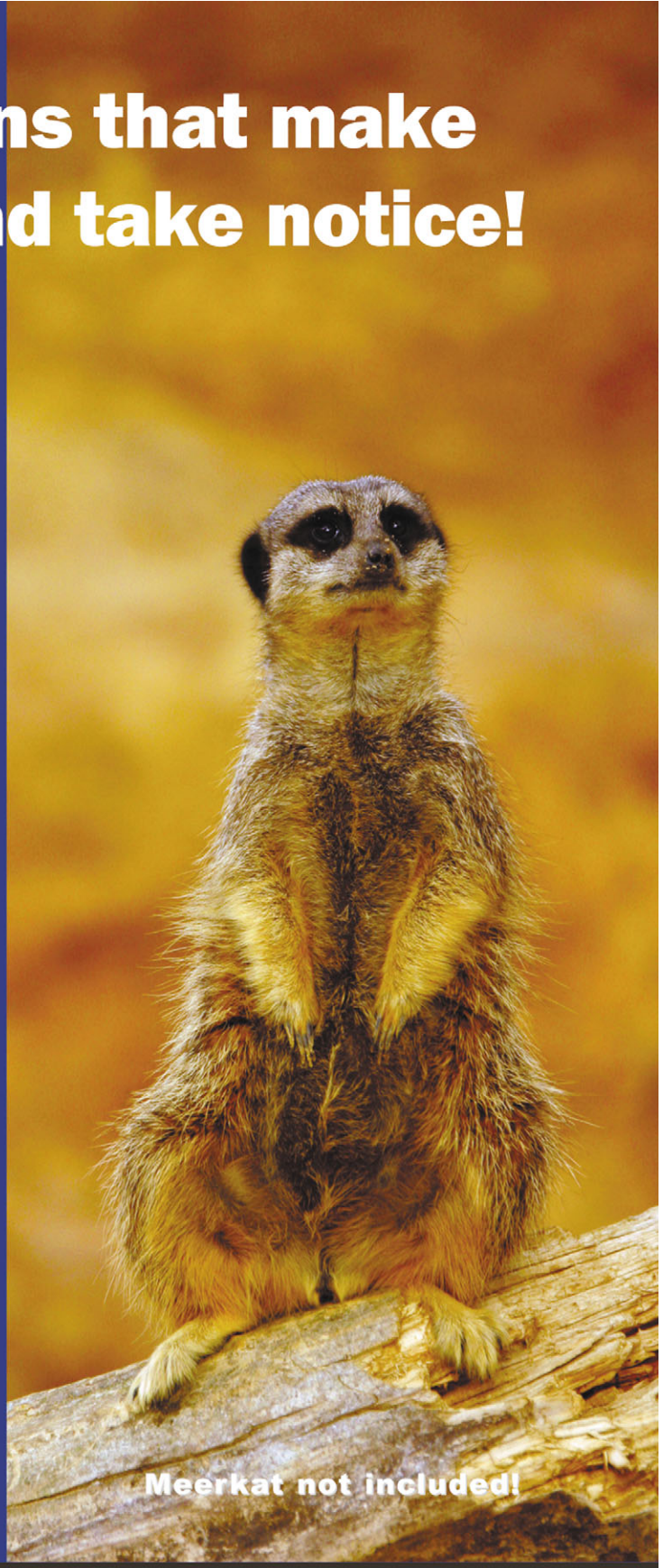


Kanguru PC Clone

This backup solution is the easiest way to create an exact copy of your hard drive. Simply connect the hard drive to the USB 2.0 adapter, connect it to your PC and run the software to make an exact copy!

Features:

- Replace a corrupted drive in minutes
- Migrate your OS to a larger hard drive
- No image files or recover CDs needed
- Includes Hard Drive & Clone Software



Available at:

KANGURU Solutions™

www.kanguru.com
Call: 888.KANGURU

PC Connection®

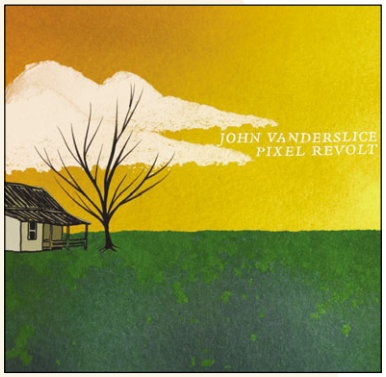
www.pcconnection.com
Call: 800.800.5555

Photo courtesy of Omar Attum Photography and stored on a Kanguru Media X-change.

music & movies

music

BY ELIZABETH DIXON



John Vanderslice

"Pixel Revolt"
$13.99 • Available: August 23

If there's one thing we're suckers for around here, it's a good lyricist. John Vanderslice is arguably new music's most vital songwriter, and, simply put, he's got a worldly knack for setting words to melody. He does it right, too, without being pushy or showy; he intelligently calls it like he sees it.

Some of the tracks, such as "Radiant With Terror," convey bold, political musings, while others offer a personal touch, more closely chronicling Vanderslice's personal life. He strays from the surface issues heard in most pop music and explores deeper concerns, as evident in "Exodus Damage": "No one ever says a word about/So much that happens in the world."

Lyrics aren't the only thing this album touts. Vanderslice pieces the compilation together in an orchestral-type manner, and, in doing so, creates an ambient sonic effect. The best part is that the whole album was recorded with only analog equipment—no synthesizers here. And that alone is amazing.

The Clumsy Lovers

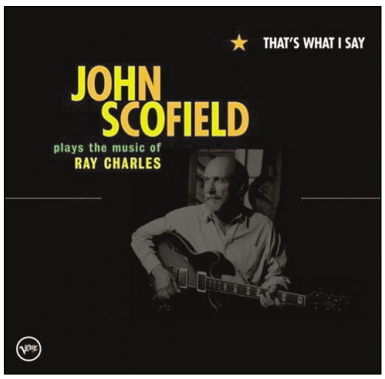
"Smart Kid"
$13.99 • Available: Now

This seventh release from rock-infused, Celtic, bluegrass band, The Clumsy Lovers, will get your toes tapping. Seeing them live won't fail to move you either; their summer tour has almost 50 stops countrywide. They put on a rowdy-right show.

Fountains Of Wayne

"Out-Of-State Plates"
$16.98 • Available: Now

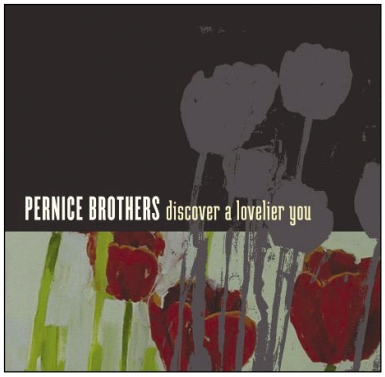
This collection of previously unreleased recordings adds breadth to Fountains Of Wayne's wide-ranging anthology. Don't expect a revolution, but we can't exactly complain about feel-good music. Did somebody say power pop?



John Scofield

"That's What I Say"
$18.98 • Available: Now

Aaron Neville, John Mayer, and Warren Haynes (Allman Brothers) join jazz master John Scofield on this tribute to legendary musician Ray Charles. The natural talent of Scofield and the soulfulness of his guests make this release worth noting.



Pernice Brothers

"Discover A Lovelier You"
$13 • Available: Now

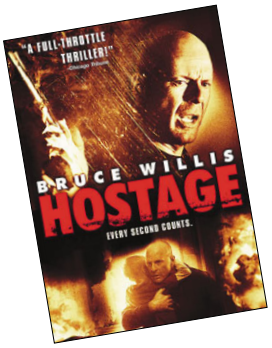
We're staunch fans of (only the best) indie music; the Pernice Brothers fall into this category. Their poppy sound is reminiscent of The Shins, while Pernice's vocals invoke Iron And Wine-like thoughts. When it comes to music, different is always better, right?

BY SAMIT G. CHOUDHURI

"Hitch"

$28.95 • Available: Now

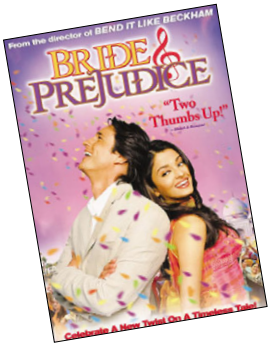
Entering a well-worn genre already pioneered by the likes of "When Harry Met Sally," "The Princess Bride," and "Pretty Woman" (to name a few) comes Will Smith's "Hitch." Groundbreaking it isn't, but enjoyable and humourous it is. Smith plays the role of Alex Hitchens (the "Date Doctor"), a relationship expert that guarantees his clients that they will land the partner of their dreams within three dates. Along comes new client Kevin James (from the TV comedy "The King Of Queens") as nerdy accountant Albert Brennaman, who's fallen hard for New York City's most eligible single female, Allegra Cole (supermodel Amber Valletta). On the side we follow the relationship between gossip columnist Sara Melas (Eva Mendes) and Alex, which plays as the comedic counterpoint to Albert's. This isn't the genre's best, but it's funny, sweet, and charming.



"Hostage"

$29.95 • Available: Now

In a massive about-face (we jest), Bruce Willis plays a tough (but good-hearted) cop that finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time in "Hostage." Early in the film, Willis' character, Jeff Talley (an LAPD hostage negotiator), loses a negotiation in which an innocent boy is murdered by his father. The tragedy causes Talley to re-evaluate his job, leading him to a police chief's post in a rural California town. Unfortunately, lightning sometimes strikes twice, and Talley is forced to face a similar predicament when a seedy accountant and his two children are held hostage by crazed teens. A subplot entailing his simultaneously kidnapped family tries to keep the story interesting. And it succeeds—if only barely. A better hostage film is Samuel L. Jackson's "The Negotiator."



"Bride & Prejudice"

$29.95 • Available: July 5

Jane Austen's "Pride And Prejudice" takes on a distinctly Eastern flavouring as the English romance is infused with Bollywood. Directed by Gurinder Chadha (of "Bend It Like Beckham" fame), this tale follows the novel closely but changes the characters' names and races and adds in the melodrama and dance routines found in traditional Bollywood fare. This is a much more hit or miss film than "Bend It Like Beckham" because it veers into the familiar territory of a classic about which many viewers may already have an expectation. That said, in this film, the story becomes more flamboyant and features more mass-audience appeal. The stunning Aishwarya Rai makes her Western film debut and holds her own in this romantic comedy.

"A Very Long Engagement"

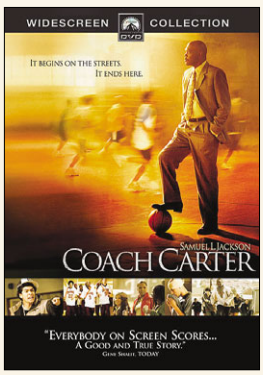
$29.95 • Available: July 12

Following 2001's charming smash hit "Amélie" comes "Un Long Dimanche De Fiançailles" ("A Very Long Engagement"), another French-language film from Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet that reunites him with the eminently loveable Audrey Tautou. Jeunet works hard to outdo his work in "Amélie" and ends up with a film that's even more visually arresting, though perhaps slightly less emotionally compelling as it winds through to its conclusion. The story leads us on Mathilde's (Tautou) quest for her love, Manech (Gaspard Ulliel), who, according to all signs, has been lost in the trenches of World War I. This is a surreal love story with some occasional patches of sheer brilliance.

other notable releases

"Be Cool"

Available now. This follow-up to 1995's "Get Shorty" is intelligent, has broader comedic appeal, features some great satire, and includes a star-studded cast. The zany characters were unarguably penned by author Elmore Leonard (who also wrote the novel "Get Shorty"), but some are, unfortunately, too obviously cast.



"Coach Carter"

Available now. This is an inspirational true story about a coach that benches his winning high school basketball team because of poor academic performance. The motivational speech clichés come fast and heavy, but the film holds true to the inspiration.

games . . .

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

Multiplatform

Madagascar

Arriving on the heels of DreamWorks SKG's animated feature, Madagascar lets you control the movie's four stars—Alex the Lion, Marty the Zebra, Melman the Giraffe, and Gloria the Hippo—and the playfully scheming penguins and wacky lemurs. Fans of the movie will undoubtedly enjoy the game's movie-based levels, but a herd of mini-games provides added entertainment. The Nintendo DS version has additional features that take advantage of the DS's touchscreen capabilities.

ESRB Rating: (E10+)veryone 10 and older—GameCube, Xbox, PS2; (E)veryone—Gameboy Advance, Nintendo DS

Price varies
Activision
www.activision.com

NCAA Football 06

Forget about polls and predictions. EA's NCAA Football 06 lets you determine your favorite university's destiny on the digital gridiron. Although the game's redesigned graphics range from innovative stadium lighting to turf texture you can virtually feel, one of NCAA Football 06's coolest features is its cross-game compatibility with Madden NFL 06. Once you guide a custom-made player through the rigors of an NCAA career, you can continue using the same player in Madden NFL 06. Commentators Brad Nessler, Kirk Herbstreit, and Lee Corso lend their voices to their in-game counterparts.

ESRB Rating: (E)veryone
$49.99
Electronic Arts
www.ea.com

PlayStation 2

In The Groove

Don't mistake RedOctane's In The Groove as a Dance Dance Revolution knockoff. In The Groove has five different play modes (Dance, Battle, Marathon, Tutorial, Fitness) to keep you shaking your groove thing while you burn calories. The game also boasts a large and eclectic lineup of tunes suitable for even the most discriminating music enthusiast. RedOctane touts the game's Expert difficulty, which it claims will bring new challenges to veteran dancers, but beginning dancers should also find In The Groove inviting.

ESRB Rating: (E)veryone
$39.99
RedOctane
www.redoctane.com

Magpix SX3 3.1 Digital Camera Binocular

You adore the pics your sister takes of your niece's and nephew's school activities, but you cringe at the telltale fuzziness from her camera's digital zoom. Chances are that you can talk other family members into going in on this better option from Magpix ($149.99; www.magpix.com). Your sister will be able to follow the action with 10X optical magnification, just like with regular binoculars. And at all the right moments, she can snap crisp, 3.1-megapixel photos. At just more than half a pound, the SX3 is also a great choice for soccer games, a day at the zoo, or checking out construction workers on your coffee break.

Turtle Beach TBS-1105 Noise-Canceling Headphones

Sometimes you wish the real world would just stop hassling you. You can't make everyone around you be quiet, but you can retreat into aural seclusion with these comfortable noise-canceling ear buds (www.turtlebeach.com). They come in stylish white to match your iPod or in silver to go with that Toyota Prius you've been eyeing. A bonus of the $49.95 retail price is an adapter plug for use with airplane audio jacks. As a lot of the fatigue known as jet lag comes from hearing the drone of a plane's engines, a set of noise-canceling 'phones might help you arrive at your destination more refreshed.

Slappa ShockShell

To judge by all the fun colors and wild styles available in the Slappa ShockShell lineup, you might be distracted from their real mission. ShockShells are designed to give your iPod mini three layers of protection: squishy EVA material on the inside, an aluminum core in the middle, and a rubberized PVC shell. You'll get a belt clip with each ShockShell, plus a mounting adapter for future accessories from Slappa. ShockShells sell for $34.99 each, but you can score three for $84.99 in case you're shopping for more than one iPod lover. Check them out at www.slappa.com.

. . . & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

Retros

The History Of The DVD Player

1995

DVD Format

Pioneer's Karaoke System, which had a 2.1GB storage capacity, met the company's goal to replace the LaserDisc with a disc that would hold at least two hours of high-quality video. Meanwhile, Pioneer and Toshiba were developing the SD (Super Disc) format, while Sony and Philips were preparing the MMCD (MultiMedia CD) format. In 1995 these two formats merged to form the DVD.

1996

Sony DVP-S7000

Available in the United States in December of 1996, the $1,000 DVP-S7000 set the tone for the look of the first DVD players, with a case roughly the size of a typical VCR. The S7000 could play CD, VCD (Video CD), and DVD formats.

1997

Pioneer DVL-700

Pioneer's DVL-700 ($1,000) let customers play DVDs and LaserDiscs in the same unit.

2000

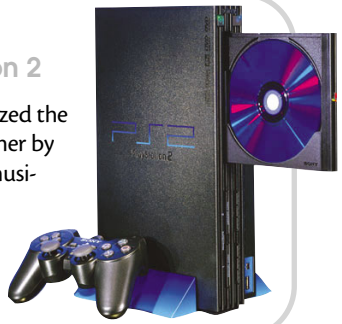
GoVideo DVR-5000

The DVR-5000 was the first to combine playback ability for DVDs and the popular VCR's VHS tapes in a single unit.

2000

Sony PlayStation 2

The PS2 popularized the DVD format even further by providing gaming enthusiasts with the ability to play video games or DVD movies on the same console.



scope

2001

Sony DVP-FX1

Sony's portable DVD player made the news in 2001 as the official DVD player accompanying the astronauts on the Space Shuttle Discovery.

2002

KiSS DP-450

The DP-450 was the first DVD player to support DivX encoding, which let DVD-quality movies play back from a CD. Based on MPEG-4 (Moving Picture Experts Group-4) technology, DivX provides higher quality video than MPEG-2.

2004

Pioneer DVR-RT500 DVD Recorder & VCR Player/Recorder

Pioneer's DVR-RT500 lets you record programs with high video quality from VHS to DVD and vice versa.

2005

Sony PlayStation Portable

Sony's ultra-portable PSP gives you gaming, music, and movies in a handheld unit. However, to play movies, the PSP only plays Sony's small DVDs called UMDs (Universal Media Discs), which means you'll need to buy new copies of your favorite movies if you want to watch them on this device.

Coming Up

In the next few years, expect to see more hybrids, including single-unit combinations of DVD recorders and VHS recorders, DVR/DVD player combos, and units that play various DVD formats. Also keep your eyes open for future follow-up formats to the DVD in the way of either Blu-ray or HD-DVD, which harkens back to the Betamax vs. VHS format debate from the mid-1970s.

BY NEIL RANDALL

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